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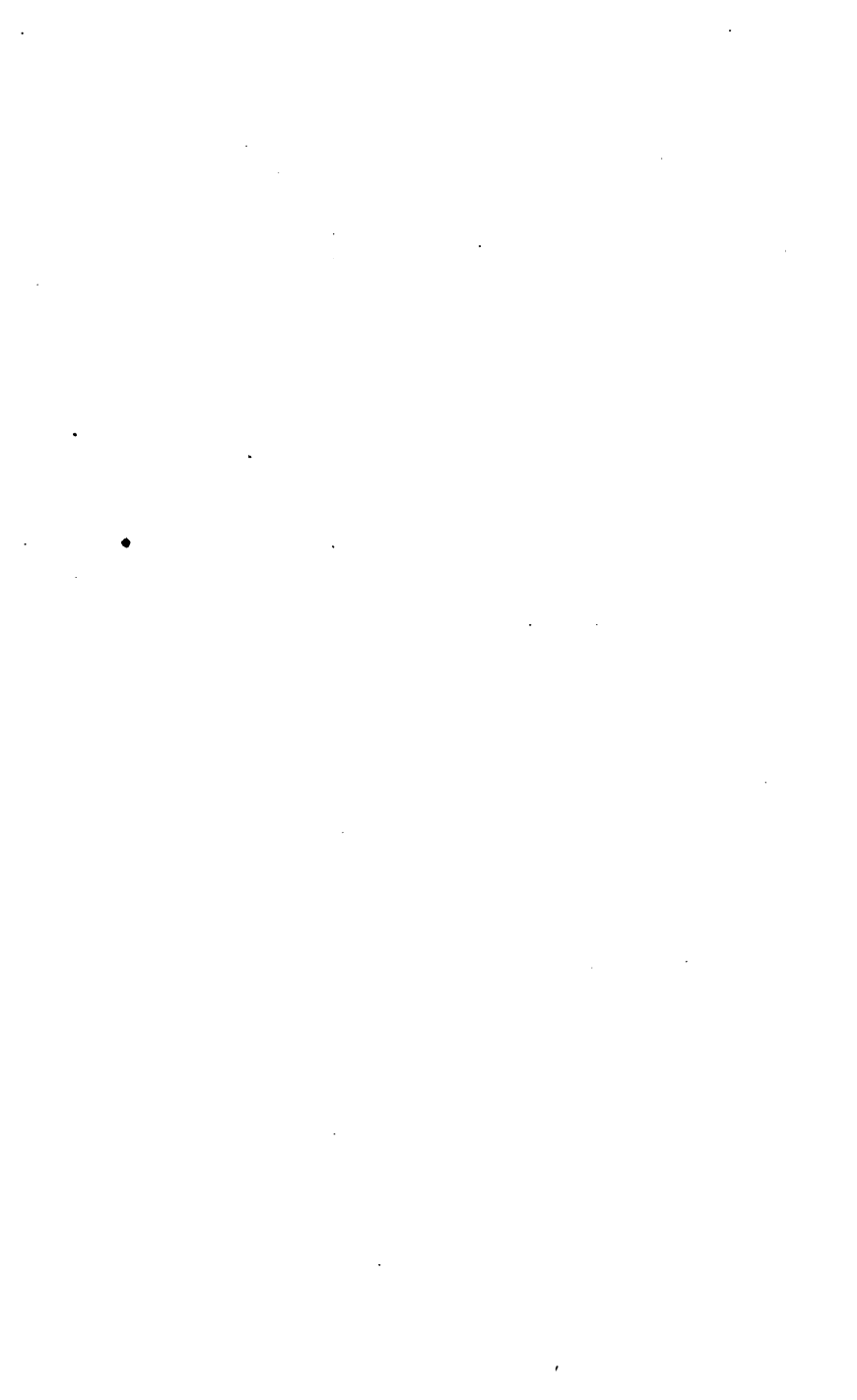
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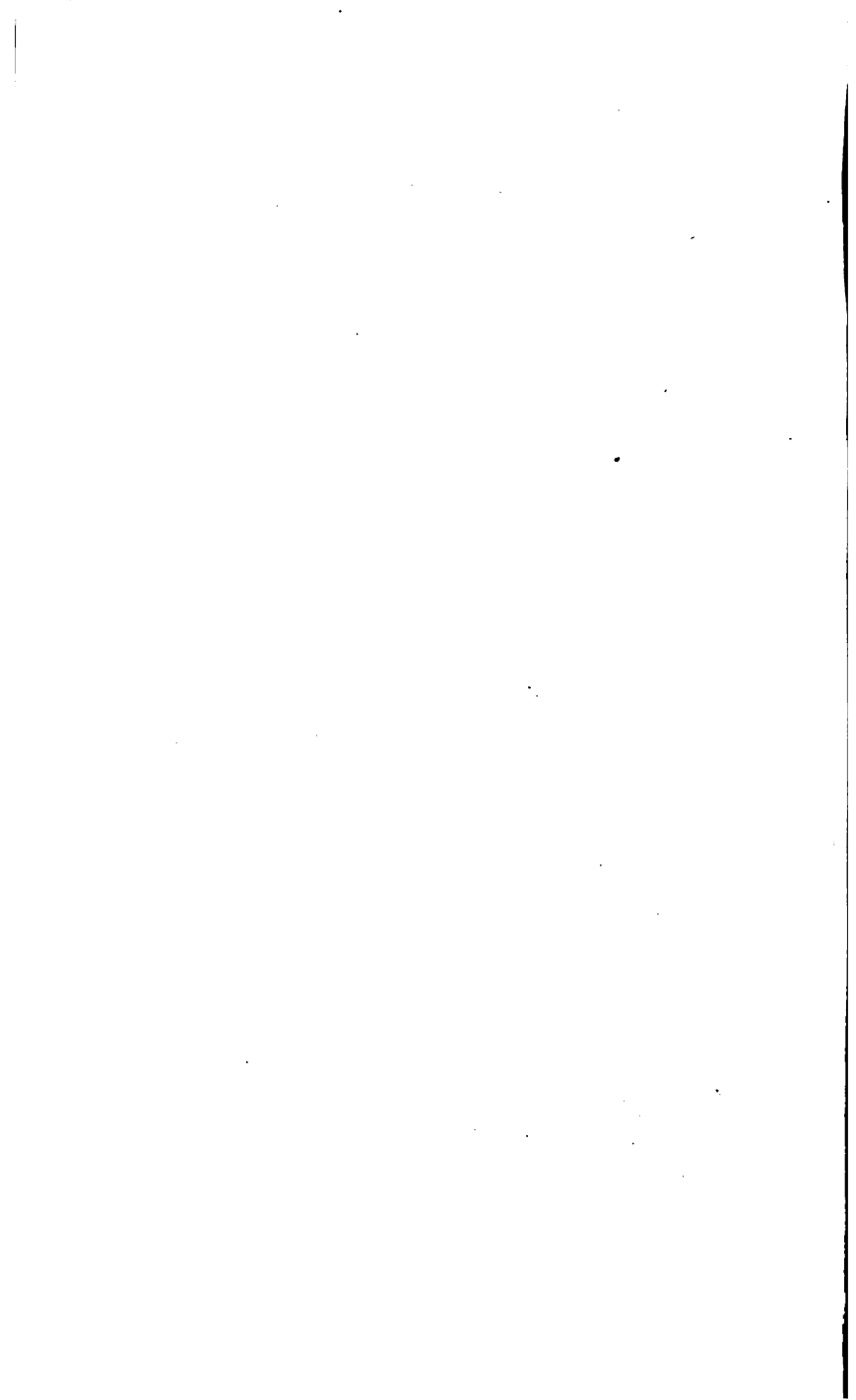
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IN FOUR ACTS.

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By HARRIETTE R. SHATTUCK.



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OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

CHARACTERS.

JOHN ROKESMITH, (" Our Mutual Friend.")

R. WILFER, (" Cherubic Pa.")

MR. BOFFIN, (" The Golden Dustman.")

GEORGE SAMPSON, (" The Friend of the Family.")

BELLA WILFER, (" The Lovely Woman.")

MRS. WILFER, (" Majestic Ma.")

LAVINIA WILFER, (" The Irrepressible Lavvy.")

MRS. BOFFIN, (" A dear, a dear, the best of dears.")

SCENE : London.

COSTUMES.

John Rokesmith — ("A dark gentleman, thirty at the most.") Plain black suit. Act IV., Dark suit. Light overcoat and gloves. Silk hat.

R. Wilfer — ("Rusty, Ruddy, Round.") Black suit and hat, worn and rusty. Act IV., Dressing-gown and slippers. *Must be short, stout, and blonde.*

Mr. Boffin — ("A broad, round-shouldered old fellow.") Thick shoes. Thick leather gaiters. Pea overcoat over suit of mourning. Broad-brimmed felt hat. Acts II. and III., Checked or striped suit. High-colored vest. Flashy neck-cloth. Watch and seals. Act IV., Add overcoat and hat.

George Sampson — ("A young gentleman of rising prospects.") Blonde hair, parted in the middle. White trousers and vest. Velvet coat. Yellow gloves. Bright neck-tie. Silk hat. Large cane, the round head of which he holds in his mouth all the time.

Bella — ("So mercenary, so wilful, but so pretty.") Act I., Plain black dress. Act II., Elegant riding habit. Act III., Rich house-dress, changed in Scene 2 to very plain dress, sacque, and hat. Act IV., Stylish walking costume, (not too rich.)

Mrs. Wilfer — ("A tall woman, and an angular.") Severely plain brown or gray waist and skirt — short enough to show slippers and black stockings. Plain collar. Handkerchief tied over head and knotted under chin. Large-sized cotton gloves (worn all the time.)

Lavvy — ("Old enough to be engaged.") Short costumes of girl of sixteen. Act IV., Long trailing house-dress, of bright color and over-trimmed.

Mrs. Boffin — ("A smiling creature, broad of figure and simple of nature.") Elegant velvet or silk costumes. A profusion of jewelry. Broad velvet hat with long plumes. Acts I. and IV., Long velvet mantle.

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

ACT I

SCENE. — *A plainly furnished room in R. WILFER's house. MRS. WILFER sitting majestically in the corner, L. BELLA and LAVVY playing backgammon, R. C. Doors R. and L. Window C.*

Enter R. WILFER, R.

R. W. Well, Piggywiggies, good morning ! and a fine morning it is too !

Mrs. W. If, *R. W.*, you had arisen from your repose at the hour generally adopted by your *family* as seasonable for leaving their couches, you might have accosted your family in more appropriate language.

R. W. Why, what's the matter, my dear ? I'm sure —

Mrs. W. (*interrupting him with a wave of her gloved hand.*) If you will gaze upon the entrance to your domicile, *R. W.*, as you issue forth to your daily toil, doubtless you will understand my meaning.

R. W. Why, what has happened, my dear ?

Lavvy. O lor ! they've been and took off ma's door-plate, pa, that's all.

Mrs. W. Yes, the man came himself with a pair of pincers, and took it off, and took it away. He said that as he had no expectation of ever being paid for it, and as he had an order for another Ladies' School door-plate, it was better (burnished up) for the interests of all parties.

R. W. Perhaps it was, my dear ; what do you think ?

Mrs. W. You are master here, *R. W.* It is as you think ; not as I do. Perhaps it might have been better if the man had taken the door too ?

R. W. My dear, we couldn't have done without the door.

Mrs. W. Couldn't we ?

R. W. Why, my dear ! Could we ?

Mrs. W. It is as you think, *R. W.* ; not as I do.

R. W. (sitting.) What I was thinking of, my dear, was, that as we have let our first floor so well, and as we have now no place in which you could teach pupils, even if pupils —

Mrs. W. (interrupting.) The milkman said he knew of two young ladies of the highest respectability who were in search of a suitable establishment, and he took a card. Tell your father whether it was last Monday, Bella.

Bella. But we never heard any more of it, ma.

R. W. In addition to which, my dear, if you have no place to put two young persons into —

Mrs. W. (waving her gloved hand.) Pardon me, they were not young persons. Two young ladies of the highest respectability. Tell your father, Bella, whether the milkman said so.

R. W. My dear, it is the same thing.

Mrs. W. No, it is not. Pardon me!

R. W. I mean, my dear, it is the same thing as to space. As to space. I carry it no further than that. And solely looking at it — as I am sure you will agree, my love — from a fellow-creature point of view, my dear.

Mrs. W. I have nothing more to say. It is as you think, R. W.; not as I do. (*Bella jerks the backgammon board off the table and crosses to hearth-rug, C. LAVVY goes down on her hands and knees, and picks up the men.*) Poor Bella!

R. W. And poor Lavinia, perhaps, my dear?

Mrs. W. Pardon me, no! No, R. W. Lavinia has not known the trial that Bella has known. The trial that your daughter Bella has undergone, is, perhaps, without a parallel, and has been borne, I will say, nobly. When you see your daughter Bella in her black dress, which she alone of all the family wears, and when you remember the circumstances which have led to her wearing it and when you know how those circumstances have been sustained, then, R. W., lay your head upon your pillow, and say, "poor Lavinia!"

Lavvy (from under the table.) I don't want to be "poored" by pa, nor anybody else!

Mrs. W. I'm sure you do not, my dear, for you have a fine, brave spirit. And your sister Bella has a fine brave spirit of another kind — a spirit of pure devotion, a beau-ti-ful spirit.

Bella. I am sure, though you have no feeling for me, pa, I am one of the most unfortunate girls that ever lived. You know how poor we are, and what a glimpse of wealth I had, and how it melted away, and how I am here in this ridiculous mourning — which I hate! — a kind of a widow who never was married. And yet you don't feel for me. — Yes you do, yes you do. (*Goes to him and passes her hand through and through his hair.*)

R. W. My dear, I do.

Bella. Yes, and I say you ought to. If they had only left me alone and told me nothing about it, it would have mattered much less. But that nasty Mr. Lightfoot feels it his duty, as he says, to

write and tell me what is in reserve for me, and then I am obliged to get rid of George Sampson.

Lavvy (rising.) You never cared for George Sampson, Bella.

Bella. And did I say I did, miss? George Sampson was very fond of me, and admired me very much, and put up with everything I did to him.

Lavvy. You were rude enough to him.

Bella. And did I say I wasn't, miss? I am not setting up to be sentimental about George Sampson. I only say George Sampson was better than nothing.

Lavvy. You didn't show him that you thought even that.

Bella. You are a chit and a little idiot, or you wouldn't make such a dolly speech. What did you expect me to do? Wait till you are a woman, and don't talk about what you don't understand. You only show your ignorance! It's a shame! There never was such a hard case! I shouldn't care so much if it wasn't so ridiculous. It was ridiculous enough to have a stranger coming over to marry me, whether he liked it or not. It was ridiculous enough to know I shouldn't like him — how *could* I like him, left to him in a will like a dozen of spoons, with everything cut and dried beforehand. Those ridiculous points would have been smoothed away by the money, for I love money, and want money — want it dreadfully. I hate to be poor, and we are degradingly poor, offensively poor, miserably poor, beastly poor. And if the truth was known, when the Harmon murder was all over the town, and people were speculating on its being suicide, I dare say those impudent wretches at the clubs and places made jokes about the miserable creature's having preferred a watery grave to me. And the idea of being as poor as ever after all, and going into black, besides, for a man I never saw, and should have hated — as far as *he* was concerned — if I had seen! And now he is dead, and all the Harmon property is gone to those Boffins, and of course they will never take any notice of me, and I'm as poor as ever. It's a shame!

Mrs. W. Doubtless old Mr. Harmon was pleased with your personal attractions, — as who is not pleased with a child of mine? — and judged you a fit companion for his son, — as who would not?

Bella. Yes, without consulting *his* taste at all.

Mrs. W. When I married your father my taste was not consulted.

Lavvy. Nor his either, was it, ma?

Mrs. W. Certainly not. It was not the custom with mamma and papa (I allude to my parents) to consult the wishes of their offspring on such matters.

Lavvy. Such matters! What matters?

Bella. They don't concern you, Lavvy, at least. As for me, pa, I am resolved to get money, and to get money I must marry money! Talk to me of love! Talk to me of fiery dragons! But talk to me

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

of money, and horses and carriages, fine dresses and jewelry, and then indeed we touch upon realities. *(A knock L.)*

Mrs. W. Who is it? Enter!

Enter JOHN ROKESMITH, L.

Roke. The servant-girl had her key in the door as I came up, and directed me to this room, telling me I was expected. I am afraid I should have asked her to announce me.

Mrs. W. (rising.) Pardon me; not at all. Two of my daughters. R. W., this is the gentleman who has taken our first-floor. He was so good as to make an appointment for this morning, when you would be at home.

Roke. Seeing that I am quite satisfied, Mr. Wilfer, with the rooms, and with their situation, and with their price, I suppose a memorandum between us of two or three lines, and a payment down, will bind the bargain? I wish to send in furniture without delay. *(Takes a chair which R. W. offers him.)*

Mrs. W. The gentleman, R. W., proposes to take our apartments by the quarter. A quarter's notice on either side.

R. W. Shall I mention, sir, the form of a reference?

Roke. I think that a reference is not necessary; neither, to say the truth, is it convenient, for I am a stranger in London. I require no reference from you, and perhaps, therefore, you will require none from me. That will be fair on both sides. Indeed, I show the greater confidence of the two, for I will pay in advance whatever you please, and I am going to trust my furniture here. Whereas, if you were in embarrassed circumstances — this is merely supposititious —

Mrs. W. (sitting.) Perfectly.

Roke. Why then, I might lose it.

R. W. Well, money and goods are certainly the best of references.

Bella. Do you think they *are* the best, pa?

R. W. Among the best, my dear.

Bella. I should have thought, myself, it was so easy to add, "the usual kind of one."

(LAVVY gets pen and ink, and R. W. and ROKE sign the agreement.)

Bella (taking the pen.) Where am I to go, pa, here in this corner? *(Signs. As she looks up ROKE looks at her and she at him.)*

Roke. Much obliged to you, Miss Wilfer.

Bella. Obligated?

Roke. I have given you so much trouble.

Bella. Signing my name? Yes, certainly. But I am your andlord's daughter, sir. *(ROKE pays money to R. W., and exit R.)*

Bella. Pa, we have got a murderer for a tenant.

Lavvy. Pa, we have got a robber.

Bella. To see him unable for his life to look anybody in the face! There never was such an exhibition.

R. W. My dears, he is a diffident gentleman, and I should say particularly so in the society of girls of your age.

Bella. Nonsense, our age! What's that got to do with him?

Lavvy. Besides, we are not of the same age: — which age?

Bella. Never you mind, Lavvy: you wait till you are of an age to ask such questions. Pa, mark my words! Between Mr. Rokesmith and me there is a natural antipathy and a deep distrust; and something will come of it! *(Goes to mirror.)*

R. W. My dear, and girls, between Mr. Rokesmith and me, there is a matter of eight sovereigns, and something for our supper shall come of it — something you all like. So now good morning, dears, and be sure to have a good fire kindled and the kettle boiling merrily, and *this* shall supply the rest. *(Exit L.)*

Lavvy. And by this time to-morrow we shall have Mr. Rokesmith here, and shall be expecting to have our throats cut.

Bella. You needn't stand between me and the light for all that. This is another of the consequences of being poor! The idea of a girl with a really fine head of hair having to do it by a few inches of looking-glass!

Lavvy. You caught George Sampson with it, Bella, bad as your means of dressing it are.

Bella. You low little thing! Caught George Sampson with it! Don't talk about catching people, miss, till your own time for catching — as you call it — comes.

Lavvy. Perhaps it has come.

Bella. What did you say? What did you say, miss? Nothing to wear! Nothing to go out in! Nothing to dress by! Being obliged to take in suspicious lodgers! *(A knock L.)*

Mrs. W. Peace! Lavinia, attend!

(Bella sits R.)

Lavvy (going to the door.) Please to walk in! Our servant is out.

Enter MR. and MRS. BOFFIN, L.

Mr. Boffin. Mornin', mornin'!

Lavvy. Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, I *think*?

Mrs. B. Yes, dear, that's our name.

Lavvy. If you'll step this way. — Ma, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin.

(Exit Lavvy, R.)

Mrs. W. (rising.) Pardon me; to what am I indebted for this honor?

Mr. B. To make short of it, ma'am, perhaps you may be acquainted with the names of me and Mrs. Boffin as having come into the Harmon property.

Mrs. W. I have heard, sir, of such being the case.

(Motions them to seats, which they take.)

Mr. B. And I dare say, ma'am, you are not very much inclined to take kindly to us?

Mrs. W. Pardon me. 'Twere unjust to visit upon Mr. and Mrs. Boffin a calamity which was doubtless a dispensation.

Mr. B. That's fairly meant, I am sure. Mrs. Boffin and me, ma'am, are plain people, and we don't want to pretend to anything, nor yet to go round and round at anything; because there's always a straight way to everything. Consequently, we make this call to say, that we shall be glad to have the honor and pleasure of your daughter's acquaintance, and that we shall be rejoiced if your daughter will come to consider our house in the light of her home equally with this. In short, we want to cheer your daughter, and to give her the opportunity of sharing such pleasures as we are agoing to take ourselves. We want to brisk her up, and brisk her about, and give her a change.

Mrs. B. That's it! Lor! let's be comfortable.

Mrs. W. Pardon me. I have several daughters. Which of my daughters am I to understand is thus favored by the kind intentions of Mr. Boffin and his lady?

Mrs. B. Don't you see? Naturally, Miss Bella, you know.

Mrs. W. Oh-h! My daughter Bella is accessible, and shall speak for herself.

Bella. I am much obliged to you, I'm sure, but I doubt if I have the inclination to go out at all.

Mrs. W. Bella! you must conquer this.

Mrs. B. Yes, do what your ma says, and conquer it, my dear; because we shall be so glad to have you, and because you are much too pretty to keep yourself shut up. We are going to move into a nice house, and we're going to set up a nice carriage, and we'll go everywhere and see everything. *(Kisses Bella.)*

Mr. B. Yes, Mrs. Boffin has carried the day, ma'am, and we're going in neck and crop for Fashion.

Mrs. W. 'Twere far from me to deny the right of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin to such pretensions.

Mrs. B. (laughing.) Yes, what I want is Society. I say, a good house in a good neighborhood, good things about us, good living and good society. Lor-a-mussy! when I think of me in a light yellow chariot and pair, with silver boxes to the wheels—

Mr. B. Oh! you was thinking of that, was you, my dear?

Mrs. B. Yes! And with a footman up behind, with a bar across, to keep his legs from being poled! And with a coachman up in front, sinking down into a seat big enough for three of him, all covered with upholstery in green and white! And with two bay horses tossing their heads and stepping higher than they trot longways! And with you and me leaning back inside, as grand as ninepence! Ha ha ha! And so says I to Noddy, my dear, *[to Bella]* let's do something for that poor disappointed girl that's had her riches all took away; and so here we are, and we want you to come and live

with us, and see the sights and enjoy the money that ought to be your own, my love. You mustn't take a dislike to us, to begin with, because we couldn't help it, you know, my dear.

Mr. B. That's it! that's it! What a thinking steam-engine in this old lady is! And she don't know how she does it. Neither does the ingen.

Enter LAVVY, followed by GEORGE SAMPSON, R.

Mrs. W. (rising.) My youngest daughter, Lavinia. Mr. George Sampson, a friend of the family.

Mrs. B. If you like to bring your sister with you when you come to stay with us, of course we shall be glad. The better you please yourself, Miss Bella, the better you'll please us.

Lavvy. Oh, my consent is of no consequence at all, I suppose?

Bella. Lavvy, have the goodness to be seen and not heard.

Lavvy. No, I won't! I'm not a child, to be taken notice of by strangers.

Bella. You *are* a child!

Lavvy. I'm not a child, and I won't be taken notice of. "Bring your sister," indeed!

Mrs. W. Lavinia! Hold! I will not allow you to utter in my presence the absurd suspicion that any strangers — I care not what their names — can patronize my child. Do you dare to suppose, you ridiculous girl, that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin would enter these doors upon a patronizing errand; or, if they did, would remain within them, only for one single instant, while your mother had the strength yet remaining in her vital frame to request them to depart? You little know your mother if you presume to think so.

Lavvy. It's all very fine —

Mrs. W. Hold! I will not allow this. Do you not know what is due to guests? Do you not comprehend that in presuming to hint that this lady and gentleman could have any idea of patronizing any member of your family — I care not which — you accuse them of an impertinence little less than insane?

Mr. B. Never mind me and Mrs. Boffin, ma'am; we don't care.

Mrs. W. Pardon me, but I do.

Lavvy. Yes, to be sure.

Mrs. W. And I require my audacious child to please to be just to her sister Bella; to remember that her sister Bella is much sought after; and that when her sister Bella accepts an attention, she considers herself to be conferring *qui-i-te* as much honor as she receives.

Bella. I can speak for myself, you know, ma. You needn't bring *me* in, please.

Lavvy. And it's all very well aiming at others through convenient *me*; but I should like to ask George Sampson what *he* says to it.

Mrs. W. (glaring at GEO. S.) Mr. Sampson, as a friend of this family and a frequenter of this house, is, I am persuaded, far too well-bred to interpose on such an invitation.

Mrs. B. We should be happy to see him at any time.

George S. Much obliged to you, but I'm always engaged, day and night.

Mr. B. By the way, ma'am, you have a lodger?

Mrs. W. A gentleman undoubtedly occupies our first floor.

Mr. B. I may call him Our Mutual Friend. What sort of a fellow is Our Mutual Friend, now? Do you like him?

Mrs. W. Pardon me! From the limited period of my acquaintance with Mr. Rokesmith, he seems to be a very eligible inmate.

Mr. B. Well, I'm not particularly acquainted with him, ma'am. You give a good account of him. Is he at home?

Mrs. W. Mr. Rokesmith has but a short period since left this apartment. Indeed, (*looking from window, C.*) there he stands at the garden gate. Waiting for you, perhaps.

Mr. B. (rising to go.) Perhaps so. Saw me come in, maybe.

Mrs. B. (going.) Good-bye for the present, Miss Bella. We shall meet again soon.

Mr. B. 'Mornin', 'mornin'! (*Exit MR. and MRS. BOFFIN, L.*)

Lavvy. There, Bella! At last I hope you have got your wishes realized by your Boffins! You'll be rich enough now *with* your Boffins! You can have as much flirting as you like *at* your Boffins! But you won't take *me* to your Boffins, I can tell you! You and your Boffins too!

Geo. S. (taking cane from his mouth.) If Miss Bella's Mr. Boffin comes any more of his nonsense to me, I only wish him to understand, as betwixt man and man, that he does it at his per—

(*LAVVY jerks his cane in again forcibly.*)

Mrs. W. Of their manners I say nothing. Of their appearance I say nothing. Of the disinterestedness of their intentions towards Bella I say nothing. But the *craft*, the *secrecy*, the dark, deep, underhanded plotting written in Mrs. Boffin's countenance, make me shudder.

(*Exeunt MRS. W., LAVVY, and GEO. S., R.*)

Bella, (taking a book, and throwing herself into a chair, R.) If there is anything ma delights in, it is in making us all seem ridiculous before strangers. But I mean to go and live with that dear old Mrs. Boffin! I know I shall love her!

Enter ROKESMITH, L., and stands silently.

And then I shall escape all this poverty and misery, and having to take in suspicious lodgers—

Roke. (interrupting.) I beg your pardon, Miss Wilfer, but I—

Bella. Eh? Oh, it's you, is it?

Roke. Only I. A—fine—morning.

Bella. Is it? I was not thinking of the morning.

Roke. So intent upon your book?

Bella (confused.) Yes.

Roke. A love story, Miss Wilfer?

Bella. Oh dear, no, or I shouldn't be reading it. It's more about money than anything else.

Roke. And does it say that money is better than anything?

Bella (throwing down the book.) Upon my word, I forget what it says, but you can find out for yourself if you like. I don't want it any more.

Roke. I am charged with a message for you, Miss Wilfer.

Bella. Impossible, I think!

Roke. From Mrs. Boffin. She desired me to say to you (what she forgot), that she will be ready to receive you in another week, or two at furthest. You do not know, perhaps, Miss Wilfer, that I am Mr. Boffin's Secretary.

Bella. I'm as wise as ever, for I don't know what a Secretary is. Not that it signifies.

Roke. Not at all.

Bella. Then are you going to be always there, Mr. Rokesmith?

Roke. Always? No. Very much there? Yes.

Bella. Dear me!

Roke. But my position there as Secretary, will be very different from yours as guest. You will know little, or nothing about me. I shall transact the business; you will transact the pleasure. I shall have my salary to earn; you will have nothing to do but to enjoy and attract.

Bella. Attract, sir? I don't understand you.

Roke. Excuse me. Since I have become entrusted with Mr. Boffin's affairs I have naturally come to understand the obligation he feels towards you, and the deep interest he takes in your welfare. I venture to remark, that much of your loss may be repaired. I speak, of course, merely of wealth, Miss Wilfer. The loss of a perfect stranger, whose worth, or worthlessness, I cannot estimate — nor you either — is beside the question. But this excellent gentleman and lady are so full of simplicity, so full of generosity, so inclined towards you, and so desirous to — how shall I express it? — to make amends for their good fortune, that you have only to respond. I take the liberty of saying these few words. You don't consider them intrusive, I hope?

Bella. Really, Mr. Rokesmith, I can't say what I consider them. They are perfectly new to me, and may be founded altogether on your own imagination.

Roke. You will see.

Re-enter MRS. W., R.

Roke. I have been telling Miss Wilfer that I have become, by a curious chance, Mr. Boffin's Secretary, or man of business.

Mrs. W. I have not the honor of any intimate acquaintance with Mr. Boffin, and it is not for me to congratulate that gentleman on the acquisition he has made.

Roke. A poor one enough.

Mrs. W. Pardon me; the merits of Mr. Boffin may be highly distinguished — may be more distinguished than the countenance of Mrs. Boffin would imply — but it were the insanity of humility to deem him worthy of a better assistant.

Roke. You are very good. I have also been telling Miss Wilfer that she is expected very shortly at the new residence in town.

Mrs. W. Having tacitly consented to my child's acceptance of the proffered attentions of Mrs. Boffin, I interpose no objection.

Bella. Don't talk nonsense, ma, please.

Mrs. W. Peace!

Bella. No, ma, I am not going to be made so absurd. Interposing objections!

Mrs. W. (*very grandly.*) I say that I am *not* going to interpose objections. If Mrs. Boffin (to whose countenance no disciple of Lavater could possibly for a single moment subscribe) seeks to illuminate her new residence with the attractions of a child of mine, I am content that she should be favored by the company of a child of mine.

Roke. You use the word, ma'am, I have myself used, when you speak of Miss Wilfer's attractions there.

Mrs. W. Pardon me, but I had not finished.

Roke. Pray excuse me.

Mrs. W. I was about to say, that when I use the term attractions, I do so with the qualification that I do not mean it in any way whatever.

Bella. Quite enough about this, I am sure, on all sides. Have the goodness, Mr. Rokesmith, to give my love to Mrs. Boffin —

Mrs. W. Pardon me! Compliments.

Bella. Love!

Mrs. W. No! Compliments.

Roke. Say Miss Wilfer's love, and Mrs. Wilfer's compliments.

Bella. And I shall be very glad to come when she is ready for me. The sooner the better.

Mrs. W. One last word, Bella, before descending to the family apartment. I trust that, as a child of mine, you will ever be sensible that it will be graceful in you, when associating with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin upon equal terms, to remember that the Secretary, Mr. Rokesmith, as your father's lodger, has a claim on your good word.

(*Exeunt BELLA and MRS. W., R.*)

Roke. (*alone.*) So insolent, so trivial, so capricious, so mercenary, so careless, so hard to touch, so hard to turn! And yet so pretty, so pretty! And if she knew!

(*Exit slowly L.*)

Act Drop.

ACT II.

SCENE. — *Drawing-room in Mr. Boffin's mansion; clock on mantel; long mirror, C.; plants and flowers in background. Doors R., L., and C.*

Enter BELLA in riding-habit, C.

Bella. I could endure that hateful ride no longer. I must see Mr. Rokesmith to-day, and I've sent for him to meet me here. Telling me of my duty to my family, indeed! Setting himself up as my adviser! I have a right to be rude to him! (*Takes off her hat and gloves, and sits in arm-chair by a small table, R.*)

Enter MR. BOFFIN, L.

Mr. B. Ah, Bella my dear, back again! That's right; "enjoy each day while yet you may," as says my literary man *with* a wooden leg.

Bella. He must be a queer man, sir.

Mr. B. He is, my dear; a regular slasher at poetry. Why, I'll tell you how he lapsed into it one day nearly every other line. Want to hear it, my dear?

Bella. Yes, do say it.

Mr. B. (repeating mechanically.)

"I'll tell thee how the maiden wept, Mrs. Boffin,

When her true love was slain, ma'am,

And how her broken spirit slept, Mrs. Boffin,

And never woke again, ma'am.

I'll tell thee (if agreeable to Mr. Boffin) how the steed drew nigh,

And left his lord afar:

And if my tale (which I hope Mr. Boffin might excuse) should make you sigh,

I'll strike the light guitar."

The poem was to me and Mrs. Boffin, and I consider that it brings us both in, in a beautiful manner. I got Rokesmith to make a copy of it, and the old lady thinks of having it framed. By the way, you've no idea what an amount of work that Secretary does, Bella, my dear. He takes such wonderful care of my affairs. And yet, somehow, I can't make him out.

Bella. May I ask why, sir?

Mr. B. Well, my dear, he won't meet any company here but you. When we have visitors, I should wish him to have his regular place at the table, like ourselves; but no, he won't take it.

Bella. If he considers himself above it, I should leave him alone.

Mr. B. It ain't that, my dear. He don't consider himself above it.

Bella. Perhaps he considers himself beneath it. If so, he ought to know best.

Mr. B. No, it ain't that neither. Rokesmith's a modest man, but he don't consider himself beneath it.

Bella. Then what does he consider, sir?

Mr. B. Dashed if I know! It seemed at first as if it was only the lawyer he objected to meet, but now it seems to be everybody except you.

Bella (rising and walking up c.) Indeed! *That's* it, then! Rather cool, I think, in a Secretary and pa's lodger, to make me the subject of his jealousy and keep eligible people off!

Mr. B. (aside.) Oho, that's it, is it? Well, my lady, we must bring you round.

Enter ROKESMITH, L.

(aloud.) Here's Rokesmith now. Good bye, my dear. Now's a good chance to tell him what you think of him. Put it to him strong, *Bella*, my dear. Ha, ha! *(Exit L.)*

Bella (turning.) Mr. Rokesmith, I wanted to say something to you when I could have the opportunity. You have no right to think ill of me, sir.

Roke. You don't know how well I think of you, Miss Wilfer.

Bella (sitting.) Truly, you must have a very high opinion of me, Mr. Rokesmith, when you believe that in prosperity I neglect and forget my old home.

Roke. Do I believe so?

Bella. You *did*, sir, at any rate.

Roke. I took the liberty of reminding you of a little omission into which you had fallen — insensibly and naturally fallen. It was no more than that.

Bella. And I beg leave to ask you, Mr. Rokesmith, why you took that liberty? — I hope there is no offence in the phrase? it is your own, remember.

Roke. Because I am truly, deeply, profoundly interested in you, Miss Wilfer. Because I wish to see you always at your best. Because I — shall I go on?

Bella. No, sir; you have said more than enough. I beg that you will *not* go on. If you have any generosity, any honor, you will say no more. I wish to speak to you, sir, once for all, and I don't know how to do it. I beg for a moment's time. *(After a pause.)* You know how I am situated here, sir, and you know how I am situated at home. I must speak to you for myself, since there is no one about me whom I could ask to do so. It is not generous in you, it is not honorable in you, to conduct yourself towards me as you do.

Roke. Is it ungenerous or dishonorable to be devoted to you; fascinated by you?

Bella. Preposterous!

Roke. I now feel obliged to go on, though it were only in self-explanation and self-defence. I hope, Miss Wilfer, that it is not unpardonable — even in me — to make an honest declaration of an honest devotion to you.

Bella. An honest declaration!

Roke. Is it otherwise?

Bella. I must request, sir, that I may not be questioned. You must excuse me if I decline to be cross-examined.

Roke. Oh, Miss Wilfer, this is hardly charitable. I ask you nothing but what your own emphasis suggests. However, I waive even that question. But what I have declared, I take my stand by. I cannot recall the avowal of my earnest and deep attachment to you, and I do not recall it.

Bella. I reject it, sir.

Roke. I should be blind and deaf if I were not prepared for the reply. Forgive my offence, for it carries its punishment with it.

Bella. What punishment?

Roke. Is my present endurance none? But excuse me; I did not mean to cross-examine you again.

Bella. You take advantage of a hasty word of mine to make me seem — I don't know what. I spoke without consideration when I used it. If that was bad, I am sorry; but you repeat it after consideration, and that seems to me to be at least no better. For the rest, I beg it may be understood, Mr. Rokesmith, that there is an end of this between us, now and for ever.

Roke. Now and for ever.

Bella. Yes. I appeal to you, sir, not to pursue me. I appeal to you not to take advantage of your position in this house to make my position in it distressing and disagreeable. I appeal to you to discontinue your habit of making your misplaced attentions as plain to Mrs. Boffin as to me.

Roke. Have I done so?

Bella. I should think you have. In any case, it is not your fault if you have not, Mr. Rokesmith.

Roke. I hope you are wrong in that impression. I should be very sorry to have justified it. I think I have not. For the future there is no apprehension. It is all over.

Bella. I am much relieved to hear it. I have far other views in life, and why should you waste your own?

Roke. Mine! My life! Pardon me, Miss Wilfer; you have used some hard words, for which I do not doubt you have a justification in your mind, that I do not understand. Ungenerous and dishonorable. In what?

Bella. I would rather not be asked.

Roke. I would rather not ask, but the question is imposed upon me. Kindly explain; or if not kindly, justly.

Bella. Oh, sir! is it generous and honorable to use the power here which your favor with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin and your ability in your place give you, against me?

Roke. Against you?

Bella. Is it generous and honorable to form a plan for gradually bringing their influence to bear upon a suit which I have shown you that I do not like, and which I tell you that I utterly reject? Would it be generous and honorable to step into your place—if you did so, for I don't know that you did, and I hope you did not—anticipating, or knowing beforehand, that I should come here, and designing to take me at this disadvantage?

Roke. This mean and cruel disadvantage!

Bella. Yes.

Roke. You are wholly mistaken, Miss Wilfer; wonderfully mistaken.

Bella (rising.) At least, sir, you know the history of my being here at all. And was it not enough that I should have been willed away like a horse, or a dog, or a bird; but must you too begin to dispose of me in your mind, and speculate in me, as soon as I had ceased to be the talk and the laugh of the town? Am I for ever to be made the property of strangers?

Roke. Believe me, you are wonderfully mistaken.

Bella. I should be glad to know it.

Roke. I doubt if you ever will. Good-night. Of course I shall be careful to conceal any traces of this interview from Mr. and Mrs. Boffin while I remain here. Trust me, what you have complained of is at an end for ever.

Bella. I am glad I have spoken then, Mr. Rokesmith. It has been painful and difficult, but it is done. If I have hurt you, I hope you will forgive me. I am inexperienced and impetuous, and I have been a little spoiled, but I really am not so bad as I dare say I appear, or as you may think me. (*Exit ROKESMITH, L.*) I didn't know the lovely woman could be such a dragon. (*Going to the mirror.*) You have positively been swelling your features, you little fool! I wish pa was here to talk about avaricious marriages, but he is better away, poor dear, for I know I should pull his hair if he *was* here. (*A pause.*) He has no right to any power over me, and how do I come to mind him, when I don't care for him? Pa's lodger and a Secretary! indeed! (*Sits L.*)

Enter R. MRS. WILFER, followed by LAVVY and GEO. S. arm-in-arm. They advance slowly towards BELLA.

Lavvy (pointing out objects in the room to GEORGE.) Exotics, George. An Ormolu clock, George. An Aviary beyond, George.

Bella (rising as she notes their approach.) Why, ma, is this

you? And here is Lavvy too! and George Sampson! How do you do, all? Ma, you shall have this very best chair, Mrs. Boffin's own favorite. (*Pushes arm-chair towards MRS. W.*)

Mrs. W. Pardon me! It were not fitting for me to occupy Mrs. Boffin's magnificent reclining couch, coming as we do from the abode of conscious though independent poverty. (*Crosses to L. and sits on a high stool.*) This is quite an honor for us. You will probably find your sister Lavinia grown, Bella.

Lavvy (*who has been examining the room, suddenly comes forward.*) Ma, I really must request that you will not drag in such ridiculous nonsense as my having grown when I am past the growing age.

Mrs. W. I grew myself after I was married.

Lavvy. Very well, ma, then I think you had much better have left it alone.

George S. To be sure, certainly.

Lavvy. I suppose you won't consider yourself quite disgraced, Bella, if I give you a kiss? Well! (*Sitting R., with GEO. S. by her side.*) And how do you do, Bella? And how are your Boffins?

Mrs. W. Hold! I will not suffer this tone of levity.

Lavvy. My goodness me! How are your Spoffins, then? since ma so very much objects to your Boffins.

Mrs. W. Impertinent girl! Minx!

Lavvy. I don't care whether I'm a Minx, or a Sphinx; it's exactly the same thing to me, and I'd every bit as soon be one as the other; but I know this — I'll not grow after I am married!

Geo. S. No, certainly not.

Mrs. W. You will not? *You* will not?

Lavvy. No, ma, I will not. Nothing shall induce me.

Mrs. W. It was to be expected. A child of mine deserts me for the proud and prosperous, and another child of mine despises me. It is quite fitting.

Bella. Ma, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin are prosperous, no doubt; but you have no right to say they are proud. You must know very well that they are not.

Lavvy. In short, ma, you must know very well — or if you don't, more shame for you! — that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin are just absolute perfection.

Mrs. W. Truly, it would seem that we are required to think so. And this, Lavinia, is my reason for objecting to a tone of levity. Mrs. Boffin (of whose physiognomy I can never speak with the composure I would desire to preserve) and your mother are not on terms of intimacy.

Lavvy. After all, you know, Bella, you haven't told us how your Whats-his-names are.

Bella. I don't want to speak of them. They are much too kind and too good to be drawn into these discussions.

Mrs. W. Why put it so? Why adopt a circuitous form of speech? It is polite and it is obliging; but why do it? Why not

openly say that they are much too kind and too good for us? We understand the allusion. Why disguise the phrase?

Bella. Ma, you are enough to drive a saint mad; and so is Lavvy!

Mrs. W. Unfortunate Lavvy! She always comes in for it. My poor child!

Lavvy. Don't patronize me, ma, because I can take care of myself.

Mrs. W. (to Bella.) I only wonder that you find time and inclination to tear yourself from Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, and come to see us at all. I shall expect you but seldom.

Bella. Ma, I think you are too bad, and so is Lavvy. Pa is too magnanimous to feel envy and spite towards my generous friends, and pa is delicate enough and gentle enough to remember the sort of little claim they thought I had upon them. And I always did love poor dear pa better than all the rest of you put together, and I always do, and I always shall! (*Bursts into tears.*)

Mrs. W. (raising her eyes to heaven.) Fate has spared you this, R. W., whatever it may have thought proper to inflict upon me. (*Bursts into tears.*)

Lavvy, (walking around excitedly.) I hate the Boffins! I don't care who objects to their being called the Boffins. I WILL call 'em the Boffins. And I say they are mischief-making Boffins, and I say the Boffins have set Bella against me, and I tell the Boffins to their faces, that they are detestable Boffins, disreputable Boffins, odious Boffins, beastly Boffins. There! (*Flings herself into a chair and weeps.*)

George S. (rising.) What I mean to say is, Why do you take me to the glittering halls with which I can never compete, and then taunt me with my moderate salary! Is it generous? Is it kind? Bear with a wretch, Lavinia, bear with a wretch, ma'am, who feels the noble sacrifice you make for him (*slaps his forehead*), but is goaded almost to madness when he thinks of competing with the rich and influential. (*Falls on his knees at LAVVY'S feet and weeps.*)

Act Drop, (quick.)

ACT III.

SCENE I. — *Same as Act II.*

MR. and MRS. BOFFIN discovered sitting together on a sofa, c.

Mr. B. And so that is the secret, is it, old lady?

Mrs. B. Yes, Noddy; and to think that he is our own little John Harmon, our own little boy that we watched and tended; and he so sad and sorrowful, and we never to know.

Mr. B. But how did you find him out, tell me now?

Mrs. B. O, when I looked in last night and saw him sitting lonely by the fire, so sad, so lonely, after what our Bella had been saying to him, every grain of the gunpowder that had been lying sprinkled thick about him ever since I first set eyes on him when he came to be your Secretary, took fire, and I knew him. Too many times I'd seen him when he was a poor child, sitting, lonely, to be pitied heart and hand. I just made out to cry, "I know you now, you're John!" (*Laughs and cries at once.*)

Mr. B. Well, well, old lady, it's all right now. He's come to life again, and shall have his money back and be happy.

Mrs. B. But he won't take it, Noddy.

Mr. B. O, that's all a notion. It's all because — now I've got a secret to tell *you*, old lady. Rokesmith —

Mrs. B. (*interrupting.*) My little John Harmon.

Mr. B. Yes, our John Harmon, old lady, only he will call himself otherwise. Well, he's in love with our Bella, and now I've got a plan to make her fall in love with him. Don't you see?

Mrs. B. Bless her dear little heart, Noddy; I think she loves him now, only she don't know it herself.

Mr. B. But she has refused him. She wants to marry money. She has mighty grand ideas!

Mrs. B. Bless you, that's all a notion, Noddy, that's all a notion.

Mr. B. Well, I've got a notion too. You know how I've been treating him of late on purpose to make her take his part. Now, to-day we shall see. I'll go it stronger. I'll be a regular old grisly growler.

Mrs. B. Don't be too hard, Noddy my love.

Mr. B. (*rising and walking about.*) Yes I shall. I'll be a brown bear, a regular old grim one. Now, old lady, you mustn't spoil it all. Come, put on a sober face, for here comes Bella.

Enter BELLA, B.

Mr. B. Don't be alarmed, Bella, my dear. I'll see you righted.

Bella. See me righted, sir?

Mr. B. (drawing her hand through his arm.) Ay, ay! See you righted.

Enter ROKESMITH, L.

Mr. B. Shut the door, sir! I have got something to say to you which I fancy you'll not be pleased to hear.

Roke. I am sorry to reply, Mr. Boffin, that I think that very likely.

Mr. B. What do you mean?

Roke. I mean that it has become no novelty to me to hear from your lips what I would rather not hear.

Mr. B. Oh! perhaps we shall change that.

Roke. I hope so.

Mr. B. Now, sir, look at this young lady on my arm.

Roke. I do so.

Mr. B. How dare you, sir, tamper, unknown to me, with this young lady? How dare you pester this young lady with your impudent addresses?

Roke. I must decline to answer questions that are so offensively asked.

Mr. B. You decline to answer, do you? Then I'll tell you what it is, Rokesmith; I'll answer for you. There are two sides to this matter, and I'll take 'em separately. The first side is, sheer Insolence. That's the first side. It was sheer Insolence in you even to think of this young lady. This young lady was far above *you*. This young lady was no match for *you*. This young lady was lying in wait for money, and you had no money. What are you, I should like to know, that you were to have the audacity to follow up this young lady? This young lady was looking about the market for a good bid; she wasn't in it to be snapped up by fellows that had no money to lay out; nothing to buy with.

Bella, (going quickly to Mrs. Boffin.) Oh, Mr. Boffin! Mrs. Boffin, pray say something for me!

(Mrs. B. weeps.)

Mr. B. Old lady, you hold your tongue. Bella, my dear, don't you let yourself be put out. I'll right you.

Bella. But you don't, you don't right me! You wrong me!

Mr. B. Don't you be put out, my dear. Now, you Rokesmith! You hear me tell you that the first side of your conduct was Insolence — Insolence and Presumption. Answer me one thing, if you can. Didn't this young lady tell you so herself?

Bella, (burying her face in her hands.) Did I, Mr. Rokesmith? O say, Mr. Rokesmith! Did I?

Roke. Don't be distressed, Miss Wilfer; it matters very little now.

Mr. B. Ah! You can't deny it, though!

Bella. But I have asked him to forgive me since; and I would ask him to forgive me now again, upon my knees, if it would spare him.

(Mrs. B. bursts into tears.)

Mr. B. Old lady, stop that noise ! Tender-hearted in you, Miss Bella. Now, you Rokesmith, I tell you that's one side of your conduct — Insolence and Presumption. Now, I'm a-coming to the other, which is much worse. This was a speculation of yours.

Roke. I indignantly deny it.

Mr. B. It's of no use your denying it ; I've got a head upon my shoulders, and it ain't a baby's. What ! Don't I know what grabs are made at a man with money ? If I didn't keep my eyes open, and my pockets buttoned, shouldn't I be brought to the workhouse before I knew where I was ? I'm agoing to unfold your plan before this young lady ; I'm agoing to show this young lady the second view of you ; and nothing you can say will stave it off. (*Bella sinks into a chair and hides her face.*) Now, attend here, Bella my dear. Rokesmith, you're a needy chap. You're a chap that I pick up in the street. Are you, or ain't you ?

Roke. Go on, Mr. Boffin ; don't appeal to me.

Mr. B. Not appeal to *you* ! No, I should hope not ! Appealing to *you*, would be rather a rum course. You come and ask me in the street to take you for a Secretary, and I take you. Very good.

Roke. Very bad.

Mr. B. What do you say ? This Rokesmith is a needy young man that I take for my Secretary out of the open street. This Rokesmith gets acquainted with my affairs, and gets to know that I mean to settle a sum of money on this young lady. "Oho !" says this Rokesmith ; "this will be a good haul ; I'll go in for this !" But fortunately she was too many for him, and a pretty figure he cuts now he is exposed. There he stands ! Look at him !

Roke. Your unfortunate suspicions, Mr. Boffin —

Mr. B. Precious unfortunate for *you*, I can tell you.

Roke. — are not to be combated by any one, and I address myself to no such hopeless task. But I will say a word upon the truth.

Mr. B. (*snapping his fingers.*) Yah ! Much you care about the truth.

Mrs. B. Noddy ! My dear love !

Mr. B. Old lady, you keep still. I tell him again, much he cares about the truth.

Roke. Our connection being at an end, Mr. Boffin, it can be of very little moment to me what you say.

Mr. B. Oh ! You are knowing enough to have found out that our connection's at an end, eh ? But you can't get beforehand with me. Look at this in my hand. This is your pay, on your discharge. You can only follow suit. You can't deprive me of the lead. Let's have no pretending that you discharge yourself. I discharge you.

Roke. So that I go, it is all one to me.

Mr. B. Is it ? But it's two to me, let me tell you. Old lady, don't you cut in. You keep still.

Roke. Have you said all you wish to say to me ?

Mr. B. I don't know whether I have or not. It depends.

Roke. Perhaps you will consider whether there are any other strong expressions that you would like to bestow upon me?

Mr. B. I'll consider that at my convenience, and not at yours.

Mrs. B. Noddy! My dear, dear Noddy! You sound so hard!

Mr. B. Old lady, if you cut in when requested not, I'll get a pillow and carry you out of the room upon it. What do you want to say, you Rokesmith?

Roke. To you, Mr. Boffin, nothing. But to Miss Wilfer and to your good kind wife, a word.

Mr. B. Out with it then, and cut it short, for we've had enough of you.

Roke. I have borne with my false position here, that I might not be separated from Miss Wilfer. Since Miss Wilfer rejected me I have never again urged my suit, to the best of my belief, with a spoken syllable or a look. But I have never changed in my devotion to her, except—if she will forgive my saying so—that it is deeper than it was, and better founded.

Mr. B. Now, mark this chap's saying, Miss Wilfer, when he means Pounds, Shillings, and Pence!

Roke. My interest in Miss Wilfer began when I first saw her, even began when I had only heard of her. It was, in fact, the cause of my throwing myself in Mr. Boffin's way, and entering his service. Miss Wilfer has never known this until now.

Mr. B. Now, this is a very artful dog. This is a longer-headed schemer than I thought him. See how patiently and methodically he goes to work. He says to himself, "I'll get in with Boffin, and I'll get in with this young lady, and I'll work 'em both at the same time, and I'll bring my pigs to market somewhere." I hear him say it, bless you! Why, I look at him now, and I see him say it! But luckily he hadn't to deal with the people he supposed, Bella my dear! And he's beat, that's what he is; regularly beat. He thought to squeeze money out of us, and he has done for himself instead, Bella my dear! There's your pay, Rokesmith, (*throwing money on the floor.*) I dare say you can stoop to pick it up, after what you have stooped to here.

Roke. I have stooped to nothing but this; and this is mine, for I have earned it by the hardest of hard labor.

Mr. B. You're a pretty quick packer, I hope; because the sooner you are gone, bag and baggage, the better for all parties.

Roke. You need have no fear of my lingering.

Mr. B. You *pretend* to have a mighty admiration for this young lady?

Roke. I do not pretend.

Mr. B. Oh! Well. You *have* a mighty admiration for this young lady—since you are so particular?

Roke. Yes.

Mr. B. How do you reconcile that, with this young lady's sing-

ing up her money to the church-weathercocks, and racing off at a splitting pace for the workhouse?

Roke. I don't understand you.

Mr. B. Don't you? Or wcn't you? What else could you have made this young lady out to be, if she had listened to such addresses as yours?

Roke. What else, if I had been so happy as to win her affections and possess her heart!

Mr. B. Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew says the cat, Quack-quack says the duck, Bow-wow-wow says the dog! Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew, Quack-quack, Bow-wow! What is due to this young lady is Money, and this young lady right well knows it.

Roke. You slander the young lady.

Mr. B. You slander the young lady; you with your affections and hearts and trumpery. You and your affections and hearts are a Lie, sir!

Roke. Mrs. Boffin, for your delicate and unvarying kindness I thank you with the warmest gratitude. Good-bye! Miss Wilfer, good-bye!

Mr. B. And now, my dear, I hope you feel that you've been righted!

Bella, (starting up.) O Mr. Rokesmith, before you go, if you could but make me poor again! Oh! Make me poor again, somebody, I beg and pray, or my heart will break if this goes on! Pa dear, make me poor again and take me home! I was bad enough there, but I have been so much worse here. Don't give me money, Mr. Boffin, I won't have money. Keep it away from me, and only let me speak to good little pa, and lay my head upon his shoulder, and tell him all my griefs. Nobody else can understand me, nobody else can comfort me, nobody else knows how unworthy I am, and yet can love me like a little child. I am better with pa than any one—more innocent, more sorry, more glad! (*Throws herself at Mrs. Boffin's feet, weeping.*)

Mr. B. There, my dear, there. You are righted; and it's all right.

Bella. I hate you! At least, I can't hate you, but I don't like you.

Mr. B. Hullo!

Bella, (rising.) You are a scolding, unjust, abusive, aggravating, bad old creature. I am angry with my ungrateful self for calling you such names, but you are! You are! You know you are! I have heard you with shame!—shame for myself, and shame for you. You ought to be above the base tale-bearing of a time-serving creature, but you are above nothing now. When I came here I honored you and respected you, and I soon loved you. But now I can't bear the sight of you. At least, I don't know as I ought to go so far as that—only—you're a monster! The best wish I can

wish you as that you hadn't a single farthing in the world. If any true friend could make you a bankrupt you would be a duck, but as a man of property you're a—demon. Mr. Rokesmith, pray stay one moment. Pray hear one word from me before you go. I am deeply sorry for the reproaches you have borne on my account. Out of the depths of my heart I earnestly and truly beg your pardon.
(*Gives her hand.*)

Roke. God bless you!

Bella. Mr. Boffin's speeches were detestable to me, shocking to me. It is quite true that there was a time when I deserved to be so righted, but I hope that I shall never deserve it again.

(*ROKE. raises her hand to his lips, and exit L.*)

Bella. He has gone. He has been most shamefully treated, and most unjustly and basely driven away, and I am the cause of it. I must go home. I am very grateful to you for all you have done for me, but I cannot stay here.

Mrs. B. My darling girl!

Bella. No, I cannot stay here. Oh, you vicious old thing!

Mrs. B. Don't be rash, my love. Think well of what you do.

Mr. B. Yes, you had better think well of what you do.

Bella. I shall never more think well of *you*. And, what is more, you're wholly undeserving of the Gentleman you have lost.

Mr. B. Why, you don't mean to say, Miss Bella, that you set up Rokesmith against me?

Bella. I do! He is worth a Million of you. I would rather he thought well of me, though he swept the street for bread, than that you did, though you splashed the mud upon him from the wheels of a chariot of pure gold—There!

Mr. B. Well, I'm sure!

Bella. And for a long time past, when you have thought you set yourself above him, I have only seen you under his feet—There! And throughout I saw in him the master, and I saw in you the man—There! And when you used him shamefully, I took his part and loved him—There! I boast of it. (*Throws herself into a chair, and cries.*)

Mr. B. Now look here. Give me your attention, Bella. I am not angry.

Bella. I am!

Mr. B. I say I am not angry, and I mean kindly to you, and I want to overlook this. So you'll stay where you are, and we'll agree to say no more about it.

Bella (rising hurriedly.) No, I can't stay here; I can't think of staying here. I must go home for good.

Mr. B. Now don't be silly; don't do what you're sure to be sorry for.

Bella. I shall *never* be sorry for it; and I *should* always be sorry, and should every minute of my life despise myself, if I remained here after what has happened.

Mr. B. At least, Bella, let there be no mistake about it. Look before you leap, you know. Stay where you are, and all's well, and all's as it was to be. Go away, and you can never come back.

Bella. I know that I can never come back, and that's what I mean.

Mr. B. You mustn't expect that I'm agoing to settle money on you if you leave us like this, because I am not. No, Bella! Be careful! Not one brass farthing.

Bella. Expect! Do you think that any power on earth could make me take it, if you did, sir? (*Goes to Mrs. B. and falls on her knees before her.*) You're a dear, a dear, the best of dears! I can never be thankful enough to you, and can never forget you. If I should live to be blind and deaf, I know I shall see and hear you, in my fancy, to the last of my dim old days!

Mrs. B. My dear girl! My darling girl! My sweet pretty!

Bella (*rising and going to Mr. B.*) I am very glad that I called you names, sir, because you richly deserved it. But I am very sorry that I called you names, because you used to be so different. Say good-bye!

Mr. B. Good-bye.

Bella. If I knew which of your hands was the least spoiled, I would ask you to let me touch it, for the last time.

Mr. B. Try the left hand; it's the least used.

Bella (*taking his hand.*) You have been wonderfully good and kind to me, and I kiss it for that. You have been as bad as bad could be to Mr. Rokesmith, and I throw it away for that. Thank you for myself, and good-bye!

Mr. B. Good-bye. (*Bella kisses him suddenly, embraces Mrs. B., and runs out L.*)

Mr. B. (*slapping his knees and laughing.*) Ha, ha! What do you think of me now, old lady? Wasn't I a regular old brown one?

Mrs. B. (*wiping her eyes.*) O Noddy, you was so hard.

Mr. B. Of course I was, old lady; but didn't I bring her round? Ha, ha! (*Imitating BELLA.*) "You're a monster! and I never again shall think well of you!" Didn't she put it to me, old lady? (*Imitating as before.*) "I hate you!" Ha, ha! Didn't she look pretty, and didn't her little eyes snap and her little feet beat the floor? I tell you, old lady, we've done a glorious day's work.

Mrs. B. But we've lost her for ever, Noddy.

Mr. B. Not a bit of it. *She* thinks so, no doubt. But I tell you it'll be all right before we know it. Wasn't I a grisly old growler, though? I knew she'd come through it true golden gold, and she has. Now she'll run home and John will go after her, and they'll both be happy, and we'll be happy too, old lady, and bide our time. This is the happiest piece of work we've ever done, old lady, I'll be bound. (*Seizes Mrs. B. round the waist and dances with her about the room and out through the entrance C.*)

SCENE II. — *A dingy office. Desks, stools, &c. Doors R. and L. Window C. R. W. seated at desk, R. C., eating bread and milk.*

R. W. I wonder if my little Bella is really enjoying herself with all her riches and elegance. (*Sighs.*) When she comes to see her poor, shabby old father, she looks so lovely and is dressed so beautifully that I feel almost afraid she'll forget us all one of these days, after she marries the enormously wealthy husband that she talks so much about. Well, well, poor old Rumty will be sorry to lose his lovely woman, for she's a very sweet and dear little woman in spite of her mercenary ideas. God bless her! (*BELLA runs in L., seizes R. W. round the neck and kisses him heartily.*)

Bella There, dear pa, how do you like that?

R. W. (breathlessly.) Very much, my dear. But, my dear, I never was so surprised! The idea of your coming down the lane yourself. Why didn't you send the footman down the lane, my love?

Bella (sitting by his side.) I have brought no footman with me, pa.

R. W. Oh, indeed! But you have brought the elegant turnout, my love?

Bella. No, pa.

R. W. You never can have walked, my dear?

Bella. Yes, I have, pa.

R. W. The idea of a splendid —

Bella. What's the matter, pa?

R. W. — of a splendid female putting up with such accommodation as the present. Is that a new dress you have on, dear?

Bella. No, pa, an old one. Don't you remember it?

R. W. Why, I *thought* I remembered it, my dear!

Bella. You should, for you bought it, pa?

R. W. Yes, I *thought* I bought it, my dear!

Bella. And have you grown so fickle that you don't like your own taste, pa dear?

R. W. Well, my love, I should have thought it was hardly sufficiently splendid for existing circumstances.

Bella. And so, pa, you sometimes have a quiet tea here all alone? I am not in the tea's way, if I draw my arm over your shoulder like this, pa?

R. W. Yes, my dear; and no, my dear. Yes to the first question, and Certainly Not to the second. Respecting the quiet tea, my dear, why you see the occupations of the day are sometimes a little wearing; and if there's nothing interposed between the day and your mother, why *she* is sometimes a little wearing too.

Bella. I know, pa.

R. W. Yes, my dear. So sometimes I put a quiet tea at the win-

dow here, with a little quiet contemplation of the Lane (which comes soothing), between the day, and domestic —

Bella. Bliss.

R. W. And domestic Bliss.

Bella. And it is in this dark dingy place of captivity, poor dear, that you pass all the hours of your life when you are not at home?

R. W. Not at home, or not on the road there, or on the road here, my love. Yes. You see that little desk in the corner?

Bella. In the dark corner, farthest both from the light and from the fireplace? The shabbiest desk of all the desks!

R. W. Now, does it really strike you in that point of view, my dear? That's mine. That's called Rumty's Perch.

Bella (indignantly.) Whose Perch?

R. W. Rumty's. You see, being rather high and up two steps, they call it a Perch. And they call me Rumty.

Bella. How dare they!

R. W. They're playful, Bella my dear; they're playful. They're more or less younger than I am, and they're playful. What does it matter? I might be Surly, or Sulky, or fifty disagreeable things that I really shouldn't like to be considered. But Rumty! Lor, why not Rumty? (*Resumes eating.*)

Bella (after a pause.) Pa dear, don't be cast down, but I must tell you something disagreeable.

R. W. (not heeding BELLA.) My gracious me! This is very extraordinary.

Bella. What is, pa?

R. W. (looking out of window.) Why here's Mr. Rokesmith now!

Bella. No, no, pa, no; surely not.

R. W. Yes, there he is! Look here!

Enter ROKESMITH, L. He comes forward quickly, and as BELLA rises, catches her in his arms.

Roke. My dear, dear girl; my gallant, generous, disinterested, courageous, noble girl! (*BELLA lays her head on his shoulder.*) I knew you would come to him, and I followed you. My love, my life! You ARE mine?

Bella. Yes, I AM yours, if you think me worth taking. (*A pause.*) But we must think of dear pa. I haven't told dear pa: let us speak to pa.

R. W. (faintly.) I wish first, my dear, that you'd have the kindness to sprinkle me with a little milk, for I feel as if I was — Going.

Bella (kisses R. W. and makes him drink some milk.) We'll break it to you gently, dearest pa.

R. W. My dear, you broke so much in the first — Gush, if I may so express myself — that I think I am equal to a good large breakage now.

Roke. Mr. Wilfer, Bella takes me, though I have no fortune, even no present occupation; nothing but what I can get in the life before us. Bella takes me! (*Embraces her.*)

R. W. Yes, I should rather have inferred, my dear sir, that Bella took you, from what I have within these few minutes remarked.

Bella. You don't know, pa, how ill I have used him!

Roke. You don't know, sir, what a heart she has!

Bella. You don't know, pa, what a shocking creature I was growing, when he saved me from myself!

Roke. You don't know, sir, what a sacrifice she has made for me!

R. W. My dear Bella, and my dear John Rokesmith, if you will allow me so to call you —

Bella. Yes do, pa, do! I allow you, and my will is his law. Isn't it — dear John Rokesmith? (*ROKE. embraces BELLA again.*)

R. W. I think, my dears, that if you could make it convenient to sit one on one side of me, and the other on the other, we should get on rather more consecutively, and make things rather plainer. (*They sit one on each side of R. W.*) John Rokesmith mentioned, a while ago, that he had no present occupation.

Roke. None.

Bella. No, pa, none.

R. W. From which I argue that he has left Mr. Boffin.

Bella. Yes, pa. And so —

R. W. Stop a bit, my dear. I wish to lead up to it by degrees. And that Mr. Boffin has not treated him well?

Bella. Has treated him most shamefully, dear pa!

R. W. Of which a certain mercenary young person distantly related to myself could not approve? Am I leading up to it right?

Bella. Could not approve, sweet pa.

R. W. Upon which the certain mercenary young person distantly related to myself, having previously observed and mentioned to myself that prosperity was spoiling Mr. Boffin, felt that she must not sell her sense of what was right and what was wrong, and what was true and what was false, and what was just and what was unjust, for any price that could be paid to her by any one alive? Am I leading up to it right?

Bella. Yes, pa.

R. W. And therefore — and therefore this mercenary young person distantly related to myself refused the price, took off the splendid fashions that were part of it, put on the comparatively poor dress that I had last given her, and trusting to my supporting her in what was right, came straight to me. Have I led up to it?

Bella (stealing her arm round his neck.) Yes, pa dear.

R. W. The mercenary young person distantly related to myself did well! The mercenary young person distantly related to myself did not trust me in vain! I admire this mercenary young person distantly related to myself more in this dress than if she had come to me in China silks, Cashmere shawls, and Golconda diamonds. I

love this young person dearly. I say to the man of this young person's heart, out of my heart and with all of it, "My blessing on this engagement betwixt you, and she brings you a good fortune when she brings you the poverty she has accepted for your sake and the honest truth's!" (*Kisses BELLA, and shakes ROKE. by the hand.*)

Bella. Thank you, pa dear, for being so good to your little wilful Bella.

Roke. I thank you, sir, for my Bella and myself.

R. W. (lightly.) Well, well, now let's be merry. Here is another loaf and plenty more milk, and if it isn't a very sumptuous repast, we can be just as happy as the three bears in their house in the forest. (*Laughing.*) I'll be the great big large bear.

Roke (gaily.) And I the middle-sized bear.

Bella (taking a hand of each.) And I the little, small, wee bear. Only, pa dear, and John, you must not eat up the poor little wee bear, because she's a very weak and silly little bear, and you are such great, wise, strong bears.

Roke. My darling!

R. W. My own little Bella!

Bella. And now, pa dear, and John, I'll set the stylish table with the elegant repast, and we'll all be happy and comfortable. (*They prepare to eat.*)

Act Drop.

ACT IV.

SCENE. — *Same as Act I.*

MRS. WILFER, sitting L. LAVVY setting table R. C. GEORGE S., with cane in mouth, extreme R., gazing at LAVVY. R. W. changing coat and boots for dressing-gown and slippers, L. C., as curtain rises.

Mrs. W. You do not, R. W., inquire for your daughter Bella.

R. W. To be sure, my dear, I did omit it. How — or perhaps I should rather say where — is Bella?

Mrs. W. (*folding her arms.*) Not here.

R. W. Oh, indeed, my dear!

Mrs. W. Not here. In a word, R. W., you have no daughter Bella.

R. W. No daughter Bella, my dear?

Mrs. W. No. Your daughter Bella has bestowed herself upon a Mendicant.

R. W. Good gracious, my dear!

Mrs. W. Show your father his daughter Bella's letter, Lavinia. I think your father will admit it to be documentary proof of what I tell him. I believe your father is acquainted with his daughter Bella's writing. But I do not know. He may tell you he is not. Nothing will surprise me.

Lavvy, (*handing letter to R. W.*) Posted at Greenwich and dated this morning. Hopes Ma won't be angry, but is happily married to Mr. John Rokesmith, and didn't mention it beforehand to avoid words, and please tell darling you, and love to me, and I should like to know what you'd have said if any other unmarried member of the family had done it! (*Sits close by GEORGE's side with a condescending air.*)

R. W. (*reading the letter.*) Dear me!

Mrs. W. You may well say "Dear me!"

R. W. Dear me!

Mrs. W. You said that before.

R. W. (*sitting.*) It's very surprising. But I suppose, my dear, that we must make the best of it? Would you object to my pointing out, my dear, that Mr. John Rokesmith is not (so far as I am acquainted with him), strictly speaking, a Mendicant.

Mrs. W. Indeed? Truly so? I was not aware that Mr. John Rokesmith was a gentleman of landed property. But I am much relieved to hear it.

R. W. (*meekly.*) I doubt if you *have* heard it, my dear.

Mrs. W. Thank you. I make false statements, it appears. So be it. If my daughter flies in my face, surely my husband may.

The one thing is not more unnatural than the other. There seems a fitness in the arrangement. By all means!

Lavvy. Ma, I must say I think it would be much better if you would keep to the point, and not hold forth about people's flying into people's faces, which is nothing more nor less than impossible nonsense.

Mrs. W. How!

Lavvy. Just im-possible nonsense, ma; and George Sampson knows it is, as well as I do. The true point is, that Bella has behaved in a most unsisterly way to me, and might have severely compromised me with George and with George's family, by making off and getting married in this very low and disreputable manner — with some pew-opener or other, I suppose, for a bridesmaid — when she ought to have confided in me, and ought to have said, "If, Lavvy, you consider it due to your engagement with George, that you should countenance the occasion by being present, then, Lavvy, I beg you to be present, keeping my secret from ma and pa." As of course I should have done.

Mrs. W. As of course you would have done? Ingrate! Viper!

George S. (rising and feebly advancing.) I say! You know, ma'am. Upon my honor you mustn't. With the highest respect for you, ma'am, upon my life you mustn't. No really, you know. When a man with the feelings of a gentleman finds himself engaged to a young lady, and it comes (even on the part of a member of the family) to vipers, you know! — I would merely put it to your own good feeling, you know. (*Mrs. W. rises and glares at GEORGE S.*)

Lavvy, (rising and stepping tragically between them.) My own unnatural mother wants to annihilate George! But you shan't be annihilated, George. I'll die first! (*Flings her arms round his neck and clings to him with a melodramatic air.*)

George S. (shaking his head at MRS. W.) With every sentiment of respect for you, you know, ma'am — vipers really doesn't do you credit.

Lavvy, (wildly.) You shall not be annihilated, George! Ma shall destroy me first, and then she'll be contented. Oh, oh, oh! Have I lured George from his happy home to expose him to this? George dear, be free! Leave me, ever dearest George, to ma and to my fate. Give my love to your aunt, George, and implore her not to curse the viper that has crossed your path and blighted your existence. Oh, oh, oh! (*Falls into mock hysterics in his arms; he deposits her in chair C., where she remains moaning and sobbing extravagantly.*)

George S. (bending over LAVVY.) Demon — with the highest respect for you, ma'am — behold your work!

Lavvy, (faintly.) George dear, are you safe? George love, what has happened? Where is ma? (*GEORGE assists her to MRS. W., who kisses her forehead; he then returns her to chair C.*) George dear, I am afraid I have been foolish; but I am still a little

weak and giddy; don't let go my hand, George. George dear, after what has passed, I am sure ma will tell pa that he may tell Bella we shall all be glad to see her and her husband.

George S. I am sure of it. I eminently respect Mrs. Wilfer, and ever must, and ever shall. Never more eminently than after what has passed.

Mrs. W. (in a very deep voice.) Far be it from me to run counter to the feelings of a child of mine, and of a Youth who is the object of her maiden preference. I may feel — nay, know — that I have been deluded and deceived. I may feel — nay, know — that I have been set aside and passed over. I may feel — nay, know — that after having so far overcome my repugnance toward Mr. and Mrs. Boffin as to receive them under this roof, and to consent to your daughter Bella's residing under theirs, it were well if your daughter Bella had profited in a worldly point of view by a connection so distasteful, so disreputable. I may feel — nay, know — that in uniting herself to Mr. Rokesmith she has united herself to one who is, in spite of shallow sophistry, a Mendicant. And I may feel well assured that your daughter Bella does not exalt her family by becoming a Mendicant's bride. But I suppress what I feel, and say nothing of it.

George S. This is the sort of thing, ma'am, that a man must expect, you know, from one who has ever been an example in her family, and never an outrage. Never more so, ma'am, than after what has passed. I shall never forget, ma'am, the touching feelings that your conduct has awakened within me. And Lavinia's also, whom I respect with a feeling little less than — divine. Yes, ma'am, I hope there isn't a man with a beating heart, ma'am, that isn't capable of — yes — of — yes certainly, to be sure.

(Restores cane to his mouth, and sits confused.)

Mrs. W. Therefore, R. W., let your daughter Bella come where she will, and she will be received. So — so will her husband.

Lavvy. And I beg, pa, that you will not tell Bella what I have undergone. It can do no good, and it might cause her to reproach herself.

George S. My dearest girl, she ought to know it.

Lavvy. No, dearest George, let it be buried in oblivion.

George S. Too noble!

Lavvy. Nothing is too noble, dearest George. And I hope, pa, that you will avoid mentioning George's rising prospects when Bella is present. It might seem like taunting her with her own poor fortunes. Let me ever remember that I am her younger sister, and ever spare her painful contrasts, which could not but wound her deeply.

George S. Ah, such is the demeanor of Angels!

Lavvy. No, dearest George, I am but too well aware that I am merely human.

Mrs. W. (suddenly turning to R. W.) Can you think of your daughter Bella, and SLEEP?

R. W. (waking.) Yes — I think I can, my dear.

Mrs. W. Then I would recommend you, if you have a human feeling, to retire to bed.

R. W. Thank you, my dear; but I think we will have a little supper first. (*Goes to table.*)

Lavvy. George! Ma's chair. (*GEORGE follows MRS. W. to table and places chair for her; she glaring at him. They sit at table, MRS. W. facing audience L. LAVVY same, R. GEORGE and R. W. beside them in front. Leave space behind table for BELLA and ROKE. R. W. cuts loaf and helps all.*)

Lavvy. Now, ma and pa, tell me if I wasn't right about those Boffins. George Sampson, speak! What did I tell you about those Boffins?

George S. (murmuring.) Yes, indeed.

Lavvy. Yes! I told George Sampson, as George Sampson tells you, that those hateful Boffins would pick a quarrel with Bella, as soon as her novelty had worn off. (*GEORGE passes his arm round her waist, but withdraws it with a sharp exclamation.*) You must be careful, George. As I was saying, those Boffins have behaved in a detestable manner, and as Bella's sister and an engaged young lady — (*GEORGE essays as before.*) Look out, George, you'll prick yourself again — I feel bound to express my opinion of them.

R. W. Will you have a little of the salad, my dear?

Mrs. W. I thank you, R. W.

Lavvy. I wish to goodness, ma, that you'd loll a little.

Mrs. W. How! Loll!

Lavvy. Yes, ma.

Mrs. W. I hope I am incapable of it.

Lavvy. I am sure you look so, ma. But why one should sit at one's own table as if one's under-petticoat was a backboard, I do not understand.

Mrs. W. Neither do I understand how a young lady can mention the garment in the name of which you have indulged. I blush for you.

Lavvy. Thank you, ma; but I can do it for myself, I am obliged to you, when there's any occasion.

George S. After all, you know, ma'am, we all know it's there.

Mrs. W. We know it's there!

Lavvy. Really, George, I must say that I don't understand your allusions, and that I think you might be more delicate and less personal.

George S. Go it! Oh yes! Go it, Miss Lavinia Wilfer!

Lavvy. What you may mean, George Sampson, by your omnibus-driving expressions, I cannot pretend to imagine. Neither do

I wish to imagine. It is enough for me to know in my own heart that I am not going to — go it.

George S. Oh yes! Thus it ever is. I never —

Lavvy. If you mean to say that you never brought up a young gazelle, you may save yourself the trouble, because nobody supposes that you ever did. We know you better.

Mrs. W. Mr. Sampson, I cannot permit you to misrepresent the intentions of a child of mine.

Lavvy. Let him alone, ma. It is indifferent to me what he says or does.

George S. Dearest Lavinia, I adore you!

Lavvy. Then, if you can't do it in a more agreeable manner, I wish you wouldn't.

George S. I also respect you, ma'am, to an extent which must ever be below your merits, I am well aware, but still up to an uncommon mark. I am painfully conscious of my own unworthiness. Is it not pardonable if I feel sensitive, ma'am, when I see a disposition on the part of my adorable Lavinia to take me up short?

Lavvy. George, notwithstanding all these surroundings, I am yours — as yet. How long that may last is another question, but I am yours *as yet*.

Enter BELLA and ROKESMITH, L.

Bella. Dearest ma, how do you do, dearest ma? And Lavvy darling, how do you do? And George, how do you do? And when are you going to be married, and how rich are you going to grow? You must tell me all about it presently. (*Throws off her hat and sits at table.*) Dearest pa, how do you do? good dear little pa! John dear, kiss Ma and Lavvy, and then we shall all be at home and comfortable. (*ROKE kisses MRS. W. and LAVVY, and then sits beside BELLA.*) Now let me pour out the tea. Dearest Ma and Lavvy, you both take sugar I know. I didn't before I was married, but I do now, because John does. Cut some more bread and butter, John, there's a love! Ma likes hers doubled. And, John dear, did you kiss Ma and Lavvy? Oh you did? Well, I only asked because I didn't see you.

Lavvy. What's the matter, ma, ain't you well?

Mrs. W. (*who has been glaring motionless at BELLA.*) Doubtless I am very well. What should be the matter with me?

Lavvy. You don't seem very brisk, ma.

Mrs. W. Brisk! brisk! Whence the low expression, Lavinia? If I am uncomplaining, if I am silently contented with my lot, let that suffice for my family.

George S. Yes, ma'am, to be sure.

Bella. And now you must tell me, dearest Ma and Lavvy, upon your words and honors! Didn't you for a moment — just a moment — think I was a dreadful little wretch when I wrote to say

I had run away? I think it must have made you rather cross. But you see I had been such a heedless, heartless creature, and had led you so to expect that I should marry for money, that I was sly about it, and so I said to John that if he liked to take me without any fuss, he might. And as he did like, I let him.

Mrs. W. On a day like this, the mind naturally reverts to papa and mamma. (I here allude to my parents.) I was considered tall; perhaps I was. Papa and mamma were unquestionably tall. I have rarely seen a finer woman than my mother; never than my father.

Lavvy. Whatever grandpapa was, he wasn't a female.

Mrs. W. Your grandpapa was what I describe him to have been, and would have struck any of his grandchildren to the earth who presumed to question it. It was one of mamma's cherished hopes that I should become united to a tall member of society. Mamma would appear to have had an indefinable foreboding of what afterwards happened, for she would frequently urge upon me, "Not a little man. Promise me, my child, not a little man. Never, never, never marry a little man." Among the most prominent members of that distinguished circle, was a gentleman measuring six feet four in height. *He was not an engraver.*

George S. No, ma'am, of course not.

Mrs. W. This gentleman was so obliging as to honor me with attentions which I could not fail to understand.

George S. When it comes to that you know, you can always tell, ma'am.

Mrs. W. I immediately announced to both my parents that those attentions were misplaced, and that I could not favor his suit. They inquired was he too tall? I replied it was not the stature, but the intellect was too lofty. I well remember mamma's clasping her hands, and exclaiming "This will end in a little man!" Within a month I first saw R. W., my husband. Within a year I married him. It is natural for the mind to recall these dark coincidences on the present day.

R. W. My dear, I am really afraid you are not enjoying yourself.

Mrs. W. On the contrary, R. W., quite so.

Bella. And now you will naturally want to know, dearest ma and Lavvy, how we live and what we have got to live upon. Well! And so we live on Blackheath, in the charm-ingest of dolls' houses, de-lightfully furnished; and we have a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and we have all we want, and more. And lastly, if you would like to know in confidence, as perhaps you may, what is my opinion of my husband, my opinion is — that I almost love him!

Roke. And if you would like to know in confidence, as perhaps you may, my opinion of my wife, my opinion is —

Bella. Stop, sir! No, John dear! Seriously! Please not yet a while! I want to be something so much worthier than the doll in the dolls' house.

Roke. My darling, are you not?

Bella. Not half, not a quarter, so much worthier as I hope you will some day find me! Try me through some reverses, John, and then tell me what you think of me.

Roke. I will, my Life. I promise it.

Bella. That's my dear John! And you won't speak a word now; will you?

Roke. And I won't speak a word now!

Bella. I'll go further, Pa, and Ma, and Lavvy. John don't suspect it — he has no idea of it — but I quite love him!

Roke. And now may I speak a word, my dear?

Bella. Yes, John dear, now I'll allow you.

Roke. (rising.) My love, now that we are all here together, and so happy and contented, I have a little surprise for you.

Bella. Another surprise, John?

Roke. Yes. (*Goes to door L. and admits MR. and MRS. BOFFIN.*) And I hope a pleasant one.

Bella (rising and meeting MRS. B.) Dear, kind Mrs. Boffin.

Mrs. B. My dearest dear darling, sweet pretty pretty. (*Embraces BELLA.*) And here is Noddy too, my child; don't you see him?

Bella. Yes, but — I thought —

Mr. B. (shaking her by the hand.) Never mind what you thought, Bella my dear. Ha! ha! John understands all about it; so does the old lady.

Bella. John understands? But what does it all mean?

R. W. (bringing chairs forward, c.) Hadn't you better offer your visitors some chairs, my dear?

Bella. Yes, pa; but — I am so bewildered, I quite forgot.

Mrs. B. Come, deary, sit right here by me; and John you sit the other side; and then we shall be comfortable.

(*MRS. B. and BELLA sit in chairs c. ROKE sits at BELLA's left. MR. B. sits R. c.*)

Mrs. W. (advancing down c.) Pardon me! But when persons comparatively unknown to this household enter here, after what has transpired in regard to my daughter Bella, it were surely fitting in one who claims to be a parent, though a humble one, to seek to know their design.

Mr. B. (rising and shaking MRS. W.'s hand.) I hope you'll excuse us, ma'am, and I'm sure you will after you've heard the story. Lord bless us, the old lady'll fix it up in a minute.

Mrs. W. Pardon me! but it were —

Lavvy. Oh lor, ma, don't make such a fuss about nothing.

Mrs. W. How!

Lavvy. I say don't make such a fuss about just nothing at all; and pray don't stand staring at me in that intensely aggravating manner! If you see a black on my nose, tell me so; if you don't, leave me alone.

Mrs. W. Do you address Me in those words? Do you presume?

Lavvy. Don't talk about presuming, ma, for goodness sake! A girl who is old enough to be engaged, is quite old enough to object to be stared at as if she was a Clock.

Mrs. W. Audacious one! Your grandmamma, if so addressed by one of her daughters, at any age, would have insisted on her retiring to a dark apartment.

Lavvy. My grandmamma wouldn't have stood staring people out of countenance, I think.

Mrs. W. She would!

Lavvy. Then it's a pity she didn't know better. A pretty exhibition my grandmamma must have made of herself! I wonder whether she ever insisted on people's retiring into the ball of St. Paul's; and if she did, how she got them there!

Mrs. W. Silence! I command silence!

Lavvy. I have not the slightest intention of being silent, ma, but quite the contrary. I am not going to be eyed as if I was a natural curiosity, and sit silent under it. I am not going to have George Sampson eyed, and sit silent under it.

George S. No, certainly not, ma'am, you know.

Mrs. W. If Mr. George Sampson, as a friend of this family, chooses to join with other members in setting aside and passing over your wife, R. W., she has nothing to say. It is quite fitting and appropriate, R. W.

R. W. (*bringing chair forward to R. C.*) My dear, will you have a chair?

Mrs. W. Thank you, R. W., no! My place is not here.

(*Mrs. W. turns, walks to extreme R. and sits stiffly. LAVVY and GEORGE S. push back table and clear it during the following.*)

R. W. (*sitting R. C.*) Just as you like, my dear.

(*A pause, during which MRS. B. rocks herself back and forward, laughing, clapping her hands, and embracing BELLA by turns.*)

Mr. B. (*sitting R. C.*) Old lady, old lady, if you don't begin, somebody else must.

Mrs. B. I'm agoing to begin, Noddy, my dear; only it isn't easy for a person to know where to begin, when a person is in this state of delight and happiness. Bella, my dear — tell me, who's this? (*pointing to ROKESMITH.*)

Bella. Who's this? My husband.

Mrs. B. Ah! But tell me his name, deary!

Bella. Rokesmith.

Mrs. B. No, it ain't! Not a bit of it.

Bella (*bewildered.*) At least his name is John, I suppose?

Mrs. B. Ah! I should think so, deary! I should hope so! Many and many is the time I have called him by his name of John. But what's his other name, his true other name? Give a guess, my pretty!

Bella (faintly.) I can't guess.

Mrs. B. I could, and what's more, I did! I found him out, all in a flash as I may say, one night. Didn't I, Noddy?

Mr. B. Ay! That the old lady did!

Mrs. B. Harkee to me, deary. It was after a particular night when John had been disappointed — as he thought — in his affections. It was after a night when John had made an offer to a certain young lady, and the certain young lady had refused it. It was the very next night. My Noddy wanted a paper out of his Secretary's room, and I says to Noddy, "I am going by the door, and I'll ask him for it." I tapped at his door, and he didn't hear me. I looked in, and saw him a-sitting lonely by his fire, brooding over it. He chanced to look up with a pleased kind of smile in my company when he saw me, and then in a single moment, Bella my precious, I knew him! Yes; too many a time had I seen him, when he was a little child, in need of being brightened up with a comforting word! Too many and too many a time to be mistaken, when that glimpse of him come at last! No, no! I knew it was John! So what might you think by this time that your husband's name was, dear?

Bella. Not Harmon? That's not possible!

Mrs. B. Don't tremble. Why not possible, deary, when so many things are possible?

Bella. He was killed.

Mrs. B. Thought to be. But if ever John Harmon drew the breath of life on earth, that is certainly John Harmon's arm round your waist now, my pretty. If ever John Harmon had a wife on earth, that wife is certainly you.

Bella. John, O John! I — cannot understand it all.

Roke. My darling, what Mrs. Boffin says is true. I was supposed to be killed, and was even suspected of my own murder; but I am John Harmon, the very John Harmon who was left to you in old Mr. Harmon's will.

Bella. Oh, I see it all now! Dear, good, unselfish John! You gave up everything, name, fortune, and position, for my sake — that I might not be forced into marrying you, you dear, splendid old John!

Roke. Yes, you have guessed the secret, dear.

Mrs. W. It seems, R. W., that your daughter Bella's husband is not what he has hitherto represented himself to be. You will perhaps remember my dark forebodings at the hour when he entered our abode.

R. W. But, my dear, think how much better it is for Bella and all of us.

Lavvy. Yes, ma, think of being deprived of the privilege of being a Mendicant's mamma!

Mrs. W. Peace, Lavinia! It is as you think, R. W., not as I do.

Mrs. B. But that isn't all yet, my beauty. Bless you, it wasn't John only that was in the secret. We was all of us in it.

Bella. But — I don't understand —

Mrs. B. Of course you don't, my deary. How can you till you're told! So now I am going to tell you. Once, twice, three times, and the horses is off. Here they go! When Noddy and me found out that this was our little John, and that we was living on his rightful property, you should have seen how frightened my Noddy was; and says he, "Old lady, we must give it all back to John and make him happy." But you see John wouldn't do that on account of a certain lovely woman. This naturally brings up a confabulation regarding the certain fair young person; when Noddy gives it as his opinion that she is a deary creetur. "She may be a leetle spoilt, and nat'rally spoilt," he says, "by circumstances, but that's only on the surface; and I lay my life," he says, "that she's the true golden gold at heart."

Mr. B. That's it, that's it! And you said so too, old lady.

Mrs. B. Don't you mind him, my dear; stick to me. Then says John, O, if he could but prove so! Then we both of us ups and says that minute, "Prove so!" "What will content you?" says we. "If she was to stand up for you when you was slighted, if she was to show herself of a generous mind when you was oppressed, if she was to be truest to you when you was poorest and friendliest, and all this against her own seeming interest, how would that do?" "Do!" says John; "it would raise me to the skies."

Mr. B. "Then," says I, "make your preparations for the ascent, John, it being my firm belief that up you go."

Mrs. B. And then he began, Bella my precious; and Lord bless us, how he *did* begin!

Mr. B. I was a regular grisly old growler, wasn't I, Bella my dear? Ha, ha! "Mew," says the cat, "Bow wow," says the dog, "Quack quack," says the duck. Ha! ha! ha! (*Walks about, laughing.*)

Bella (rising.) Oh, now I see it all. You dear, dear Mr. Boffin! You didn't mean it, after all. (*Goes to him and shakes his hand in both of hers.*) And, Mrs. Boffin, how kind and good you were to me when I was such a little wretch. (*Embraces her; she rises.*) And John too, all of you doing everything to bring good-for-nothing little me to my senses. (*Going to R. W., who rises.*) Pa dear, why is it that you all have been so kind and considerate with me? Dear, good little Pa! And Ma dear, now you see how good and kind my Mr. and Mrs. Boffin have been to me.

Mrs. W. (rising.) The claims of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin upon my child are doubtless of paramount importance. It is quite fitting, R. W., that such should be the case.

Bella. But is the story done? Is there no more of it?

Mrs. B. What more of it should there be, deary?

Bella. Are you sure you have left nothing out of it?

Mrs. B. I don't think I have.

Bella. Then, sir, please, I've something to say to you. (*To Mr.*

B., *who stands c.*) Please I beg your pardon, and I made a small mistake of a word when I took leave of you last. Please I have found out something not yet mentioned. Please I don't believe you are a hard-hearted miser at all, and please I don't believe you ever for one single minute were!

Mrs. B. That's it, my deary; he pretended it all, and O my, how he did it!

Mr. B. I assure you, my dear, that on that celebrated day I made what has since been agreed upon to be my grandest demonstration — I allude to Mew says the cat, Quack quack says the duck, and Bow-wow-wow says the dog. Never thought of it afore the moment, my dear! When John said, if he had been so happy as to win your affections and possess your heart, it come into my head to turn round upon him with "Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew says the cat, Quack quack says the duck, and Bow-wow-wow says the dog." I couldn't tell you how it come into my head or where from, but it had so much the sound of a rasp, that I own to you it astonished myself. I was awful nigh bursting out a-laughing though, when it made John stare! Ha, ha, ha!

Mrs. B. Well now, my dear, here we all are, and your mother and father's agreed, and Noddy and me's so happy in telling you, and the horses is in, and the story is done, and God bless you, my Beauty, and God bless us all.

MRS. BOFFIN. BELLA.

MR. BOFFIN.

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THE HOBBY HORSE Comedy in Three Acts. Ten males, five females. Costumes, modern; scenery easy. Plays two hours and a half.

IRIS Drama in Five Acts. Seven males, seven females. Costumes, modern; scenery, three interiors. Plays a full evening.

LADY BOUNTIFUL Play in Four Acts. Eight males, seven females. Costumes, modern; scenery, four interiors, not easy. Plays a full evening.

LETTY Drama in Four Acts and an Epilogue. Ten males, five females. Costumes, modern; scenery complicated. Plays a full evening.

THE MAGISTRATE Farce in Three Acts. Twelve males, four females. Costumes, modern; scenery, all interior. Plays two hours and a half.

Sent prepaid on receipt of price by

Walter H. Baker & Company

No. 5 Hamilton Place, Boston, Massachusetts

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

A Comedy,

IN FOUR ACTS.

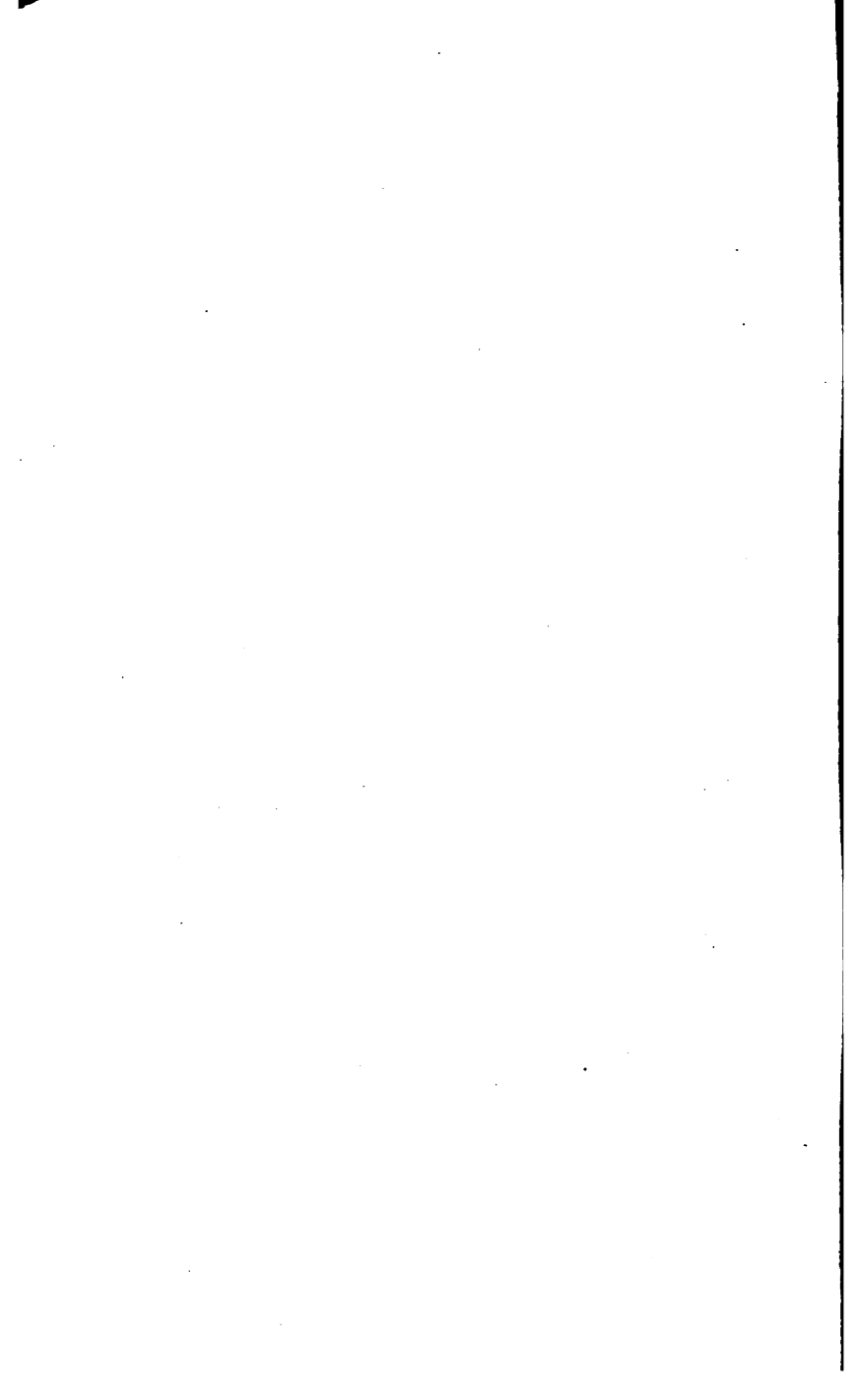
DRAMATIZED FROM CHARLES DICKENS

By HARRIETTE R. SHATTUCK.



BOSTON:

Walter H. Baker & Co.



OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

CHARACTERS.

JOHN ROKESMITH, (" Our Mutual Friend.")

R. WILFER, (" Cherubic Pa.")

MR. BOFFIN, (" The Golden Dustman.")

GEORGE SAMPSON, (" The Friend of the Family.")

BELLA WILFER, (" The Lovely Woman.")

MRS. WILFER, (" Majestic Ma.")

LAVINIA WILFER, (" The Irrepressible Lavvy.")

MRS. BOFFIN, (" A dear, a dear, the best of dears.")

SCENE : London.

COSTUMES.

John Rokesmith — ("A dark gentleman, thirty at the most.") Plain black suit. Act IV., Dark suit. Light overcoat and gloves. Silk hat.

R. Wilfer — ("Rusty, Ruddy, Round.") Black suit and hat, worn and rusty. Act IV., Dressing-gown and slippers. *Must be short, stout, and blonde.*

Mr. Boffin — ("A broad, round-shouldered old fellow.") Thick shoes. Thick leather gaiters. Pea overcoat over suit of mourning. Broad-brimmed felt hat. Acts II. and III., Checked or striped suit. High-colored vest. Flashy neck-cloth. Watch and seals. Act IV., Add overcoat and hat.

George Sampson — ("A young gentleman of rising prospects.") Blonde hair, parted in the middle. White trousers and vest. Velvet coat. Yellow gloves. Bright neck-tie. Silk hat. Large cane, the round head of which he holds in his mouth all the time.

Bella — ("So mercenary, so wilful, but so pretty.") Act I., Plain black dress. Act II., Elegant riding habit. Act III., Rich house-dress, changed in Scene 2 to very plain dress, sacque, and hat. Act IV., Stylish walking costume, (not too rich.)

Mrs. Wilfer — ("A tall woman, and an angular.") Severely plain brown or gray waist and skirt — short enough to show slippers and black stockings. Plain collar. Handkerchief tied over head and knotted under chin. Large-sized cotton gloves (worn all the time.)

Lavvy — ("Old enough to be engaged.") Short costumes of girl of sixteen. Act IV., Long trailing house-dress, of bright color and over-trimmed.

Mrs. Boffin — ("A smiling creature, broad of figure and simple of nature.") Elegant velvet or silk costumes. A profusion of jewelry. Broad velvet hat with long plumes. Acts I. and IV., Long velvet mantle.

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

ACT I.

SCENE. — *A plainly furnished room in R. WILFER's house. MRS. WILFER sitting majestically in the corner, L. BELLA and LAVVY playing backgammon, R. C. Doors R. and L. Window C.*

Enter R. WILFER, R.

R. W. Well, Piggywiggies, good morning ! and a fine morning it is too !

Mrs. W. If, *R. W.*, you had arisen from your repose at the hour generally adopted by your *family* as seasonable for leaving their couches, you might have accosted your family in more appropriate language.

R. W. Why, what's the matter, my dear ? I'm sure —

Mrs. W. (*interrupting him with a wave of her gloved hand.*) If you will gaze upon the entrance to your domicile, *R. W.*, as you issue forth to your daily toil, doubtless you will understand my meaning.

R. W. Why, what has happened, my dear ?

Lavvy. O lor ! they've been and took off ma's door-plate, pa, that's all.

Mrs. W. Yes, the man came himself with a pair of pincers, and took it off, and took it away. He said that as he had no expectation of ever being paid for it, and as he had an order for another Ladies' School door-plate, it was better (burnished up) for the interests of all parties.

R. W. Perhaps it was, my dear ; what do you think ?

Mrs. W. You are master here, *R. W.* It is as you think ; not as I do. Perhaps it might have been better if the man had taken the door too ?

R. W. My dear, we couldn't have done without the door.

— *Mrs. W.* Couldn't we ?

R. W. Why, my dear ! Could we ?

Mrs. W. It is as you think, *R. W.* ; not as I do.

R. W. (sitting.) What I was thinking of, my dear, was, that as we have let our first floor so well, and as we have now no place in which you could teach pupils, even if pupils —

Mrs. W. (interrupting.) The milkman said he knew of two young ladies of the highest respectability who were in search of a suitable establishment, and he took a card. Tell your father whether it was last Monday, Bella.

Bella. But we never heard any more of it, ma.

R. W. In addition to which, my dear, if you have no place to put two young persons into —

Mrs. W. (waving her gloved hand.) Pardon me, they were not young persons. Two young ladies of the highest respectability. Tell your father, Bella, whether the milkman said so.

R. W. My dear, it is the same thing.

Mrs. W. No, it is not. Pardon me!

R. W. I mean, my dear, it is the same thing as to space. As to space. I carry it no further than that. And solely looking at it — as I am sure you will agree, my love — from a fellow-creature point of view, my dear.

Mrs. W. I have nothing more to say. It is as you think, *R. W.*; not as I do. (*Bella jerks the backgammon board off the table and crosses to hearth-rug, c. LAVVY goes down on her hands and knees, and picks up the men.*) Poor Bella!

R. W. And poor Lavinia, perhaps, my dear?

Mrs. W. Pardon me, no! No, *R. W.* Lavinia has not known the trial that Bella has known. The trial that your daughter Bella has undergone, is, perhaps, without a parallel, and has been borne, I will say, nobly. When you see your daughter Bella in her black dress, which she alone of all the family wears, and when you remember the circumstances which have led to her wearing it and when you know how those circumstances have been sustained, then, *R. W.*, lay your head upon your pillow, and say, "poor Lavinia!"

Lavvy (from under the table.) I don't want to be "poored" by pa, nor anybody else!

Mrs. W. I'm sure you do not, my dear, for you have a fine, brave spirit. And your sister Bella has a fine brave spirit of another kind — a spirit of pure devotion, a beau-ti-ful spirit.

Bella. I am sure, though you have no feeling for me, pa, I am one of the most unfortunate girls that ever lived. You know how poor we are, and what a glimpse of wealth I had, and how it melted away, and how I am here in this ridiculous mourning — which I hate! — a kind of a widow who never was married. And yet you don't feel for me. — Yes you do, yes you do. (*Goes to him and passes her hand through and through his hair.*)

R. W. My dear, I do.

Bella. Yes, and I say you ought to. If they had only left me alone and told me nothing about it, it would have mattered much less. But that nasty Mr. Lightfoot feels it his duty, as he says, to

write and tell me what is in reserve for me, and then I am obliged to get rid of George Sampson.

Lavvy (rising.) You never cared for George Sampson, Bella.

Bella. And did I say I did, miss? George Sampson was very fond of me, and admired me very much, and put up with everything I did to him.

Lavvy. You were rude enough to him.

Bella. And did I say I wasn't, miss? I am not setting up to be sentimental about George Sampson. I only say George Sampson was better than nothing.

Lavvy. You didn't show him that you thought even that.

Bella. You are a chit and a little idiot, or you wouldn't make such a dolly speech. What did you expect me to do? Wait till you are a woman, and don't talk about what you don't understand. You only show your ignorance! It's a shame! There never was such a hard case! I shouldn't care so much if it wasn't so ridiculous. It was ridiculous enough to have a stranger coming over to marry me, whether he liked it or not. It was ridiculous enough to know I shouldn't like him — how *could* I like him, left to him in a will like a dozen of spoons, with everything cut and dried beforehand. Those ridiculous points would have been smoothed away by the money, for I love money, and want money — want it dreadfully. I hate to be poor, and we are degradingly poor, offensively poor, miserably poor, beastly poor. And if the truth was known, when the Harmon murder was all over the town, and people were speculating on its being suicide, I dare say those impudent wretches at the clubs and places made jokes about the miserable creature's having preferred a watery grave to me. And the idea of being as poor as ever after all, and going into black, besides, for a man I never saw, and should have hated — as far as *he* was concerned — if I had seen! And now he is dead, and all the Harmon property is gone to those Boffins, and of course they will never take any notice of me, and I'm as poor as ever. It's a shame!

Mrs. W. Doubtless old Mr. Harmon was pleased with your personal attractions, — as who is not pleased with a child of mine? — and judged you a fit companion for his son, — as who would not?

Bella. Yes, without consulting *his* taste at all.

Mrs. W. When I married your father my taste was not consulted.

Lavvy. Nor his either, was it, ma?

Mrs. W. Certainly not. It was not the custom with mamma and papa (I allude to my parents) to consult the wishes of their offspring on such matters.

Lavvy. Such matters! What matters?

Bella. They don't concern you, Lavvy, at least. As for me, pa, I am resolved to get money, and to get money I must marry money! Talk to me of love! Talk to me of fiery dragons! But talk to me

of money, and horses and carriages, fine dresses and jewelry, and then indeed we touch upon realities. *(A knock L.)*

Mrs. W. Who is it? Enter!

Enter JOHN ROKESMITH, L.

Roke. The servant-girl had her key in the door as I came up, and directed me to this room, telling me I was expected. I am afraid I should have asked her to announce me.

Mrs. W. (rising.) Pardon me; not at all. Two of my daughters. R. W., this is the gentleman who has taken our first-floor. He was so good as to make an appointment for this morning, when you would be at home.

Roke. Seeing that I am quite satisfied, Mr. Wilfer, with the rooms, and with their situation, and with their price, I suppose a memorandum between us of two or three lines, and a payment down, will bind the bargain? I wish to send in furniture without delay. *(Takes a chair which R. W. offers him.)*

Mrs. W. The gentleman, R. W., proposes to take our apartments by the quarter. A quarter's notice on either side.

R. W. Shall I mention, sir, the form of a reference?

Roke. I think that a reference is not necessary; neither, to say the truth, is it convenient, for I am a stranger in London. I require no reference from you, and perhaps, therefore, you will require none from me. That will be fair on both sides. Indeed, I show the greater confidence of the two, for I will pay in advance whatever you please, and I am going to trust my furniture here. Whereas, if you were in embarrassed circumstances — this is merely supposititious —

Mrs. W. (sitting.) Perfectly.

Roke. Why then, I might lose it.

R. W. Well, money and goods are certainly the best of references.

Bella. Do you think they *are* the best, pa?

R. W. Among the best, my dear.

Bella. I should have thought, myself, it was so easy to add, "the usual kind of one."

(LAVVY gets pen and ink, and R. W. and ROKE sign the agreement.)

Bella (taking the pen.) Where am I to go, pa, here in this corner? *(Signs. As she looks up ROKE looks at her and she at him.)*

Roke. Much obliged to you, Miss Wilfer.

Bella. Obligated?

Roke. I have given you so much trouble.

Bella. Signing my name? Yes, certainly. But I am your andlord's daughter, sir. *(ROKE. pays money to R. W., and exit R.)*

Bella. Pa, we have got a murderer for a tenant.

Lavvy. Pa, we have got a robber.

Bella. To see him unable for his life to look anybody in the face! There never was such an exhibition.

R. W. My dears, he is a diffident gentleman, and I should say particularly so in the society of girls of your age.

Bella. Nonsense, our age! What's that got to do with him?

Lavvy. Besides, we are not of the same age: — which age?

Bella. Never you mind, Lavvy: you wait till you are of an age to ask such questions. Pa, mark my words! Between Mr. Rokesmith and me there is a natural antipathy and a deep distrust; and something will come of it! *(Goes to mirror.)*

R. W. My dear, and girls, between Mr. Rokesmith and me, there is a matter of eight sovereigns, and something for our supper shall come of it — something you all like. So now good morning, dears, and be sure to have a good fire kindled and the kettle boiling merrily, and *this* shall supply the rest. *(Exit L.)*

Lavvy. And by this time to-morrow we shall have Mr. Rokesmith here, and shall be expecting to have our throats cut.

Bella. You needn't stand between me and the light for all that. This is another of the consequences of being poor! The idea of a girl with a really fine head of hair having to do it by a few inches of looking-glass!

Lavvy. You caught George Sampson with it, Bella, bad as your means of dressing it are.

Bella. You low little thing! Caught George Sampson with it! Don't talk about catching people, miss, till your own time for catching — as you call it — comes.

Lavvy. Perhaps it has come.

Bella. What did you say? What did you say, miss? Nothing to wear! Nothing to go out in! Nothing to dress by! Being obliged to take in suspicious lodgers! *(A knock L.)*

Mrs. W. Peace! Lavinia, attend!

(Bella sits R.)

Lavvy (going to the door.) Please to walk in! Our servant is out.

Enter MR. and MRS. BOFFIN, L.

Mr. Boffin. Mornin', mornin'!

Lavvy. Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, I *think*?

Mrs. B. Yes, dear, that's our name.

Lavvy. If you'll step this way. — Ma, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin.

(Exit Lavvy, R.)

Mrs. W. (rising.) Pardon me; to what am I indebted for this honor?

Mr. B. To make short of it, ma'am, perhaps you may be acquainted with the names of me and Mrs. Boffin as having come into the Harmon property.

Mrs. W. I have heard, sir, of such being the case.

(Motions them to seats, which they take.)

Mr. B. And I dare say, ma'am, you are not very much inclined to take kindly to us?

Mrs. W. Pardon me. 'Twere unjust to visit upon Mr. and Mrs. Boffin a calamity which was doubtless a dispensation.

Mr. B. That's fairly meant, I am sure. Mrs. Boffin and me, ma'am, are plain people, and we don't want to pretend to anything, nor yet to go round and round at anything; because there's always a straight way to everything. Consequently, we make this call to say, that we shall be glad to have the honor and pleasure of your daughter's acquaintance, and that we shall be rejoiced if your daughter will come to consider our house in the light of her home equally with this. In short, we want to cheer your daughter, and to give her the opportunity of sharing such pleasures as we are agoing to take ourselves. We want to brisk her up, and brisk her about, and give her a change.

Mrs. B. That's it! Lor! let's be comfortable.

Mrs. W. Pardon me. I have several daughters. Which of my daughters am I to understand is thus favored by the kind intentions of Mr. Boffin and his lady?

Mr. B. Don't you see? Naturally, Miss Bella, you know.

Mrs. W. Oh-h! My daughter Bella is accessible, and shall speak for herself.

Bella. I am much obliged to you, I'm sure, but I doubt if I have the inclination to go out at all.

Mrs. W. Bella! you must conquer this.

Mrs. B. Yes, do what your ma says, and conquer it, my dear; because we shall be so glad to have you, and because you are much too pretty to keep yourself shut up. We are going to move into a nice house, and we're going to set up a nice carriage, and we'll go everywhere and see everything. *(Kisses Bella.)*

Mr. B. Yes, Mrs. Boffin has carried the day, ma'am, and we're going in neck and crop for Fashion.

Mrs. W. 'Twere far from me to deny the right of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin to such pretensions.

Mrs. B. (laughing.) Yes, what I want is Society. I say, a good house in a good neighborhood, good things about us, good living and good society. Lor-a-mussy! when I think of me in a light yellow chariot and pair, with silver boxes to the wheels—

Mr. B. Oh! you was twinking of that, was you, my dear?

Mrs. B. Yes! And with a footman up behind, with a bar across, to keep his legs from being poled! And with a coachman up in front, sinking down into a seat big enough for three of him, all covered with upholstery in green and white! And with two bay horses tossing their heads and stepping higher than they trot longways! And with you and me leaning back inside, as grand as ninepence! Ha ha ha! And so says I to Noddy, my dear, [*to Bella*] let's do something for that poor disappointed girl that's had her riches all took away; and so here we are, and we want you to come and live

with us, and see the sights and enjoy the money that ought to be your own, my love. You mustn't take a dislike to us, to begin with, because we couldn't help it, you know, my dear.

Mr. B. That's it! that's it! What a thinking steam-ingen in this old lady is! And she don't know how she does it. Neither does the ingen.

Enter LAVVY, followed by GEORGE SAMPSON, R.

Mrs. W. (rising.) My youngest daughter, Lavinia. Mr. George Sampson, a friend of the family.

Mrs. B. If you like to bring your sister with you when you come to stay with us, of course we shall be glad. The better you please yourself, Miss Bella, the better you'll please us.

Lavvy. Oh, my consent is of no consequence at all, I suppose?

Bella. Lavvy, have the goodness to be seen and not heard.

Lavvy. No, I won't! I'm not a child, to be taken notice of by strangers.

Bella. You are a child!

Lavvy. I'm not a child, and I won't be taken notice of. "Bring your sister," indeed!

Mrs. W. Lavinia! Hold! I will not allow you to utter in my presence the absurd suspicion that any strangers — I care not what their names — can patronize my child. Do you dare to suppose, you ridiculous girl, that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin would enter these doors upon a patronizing errand; or, if they did, would remain within them, only for one single instant, while your mother had the strength yet remaining in her vital frame to request them to depart? You little know your mother if you presume to think so.

Lavvy. It's all very fine —

Mrs. W. Hold! I will not allow this. Do you not know what is due to guests? Do you not comprehend that in presuming to hint that this lady and gentleman could have any idea of patronizing any member of your family — I care not which — you accuse them of an impertinence little less than insane?

Mr. B. Never mind me and Mrs. Boffin, ma'am; we don't care.

Mrs. W. Pardon me, but I do.

Lavvy. Yes, to be sure.

Mrs. W. And I require my audacious child to please to be just to her sister Bella; to remember that her sister Bella is much sought after; and that when her sister Bella accepts an attention, she considers herself to be conferring qui-i-te as much honor as she receives.

Bella. I can speak for myself, you know, ma. You needn't bring me in, please.

Lavvy. And it's all very well aiming at others through convenient me; but I should like to ask George Sampson what *he* says to it.

Mrs. W. (glaring at GEO. S.) Mr. Sampson, as a friend of this family and a frequenter of this house, is, I am persuaded, far too well-bred to interpose on such an invitation.

Mrs. B. We should be happy to see *him* at any time.

George S. Much obliged to you, but I'm always engaged, day and night.

Mr. B. By the way, ma'am, you have a lodger?

Mrs. W. A gentleman undoubtedly occupies our first floor.

Mr. B. I may call him Our Mutual Friend. What sort of a fellow is Our Mutual Friend, now? Do you like him?

Mrs. W. Pardon me! From the limited period of my acquaintance with Mr. Rokesmith, he seems to be a very eligible inmate.

Mr. B. Well, I'm not particularly acquainted with him, ma'am. You give a good account of him. Is he at home?

Mrs. W. Mr. Rokesmith has but a short period since left this apartment. Indeed, (*looking from window, c.*) there he stands at the garden gate. Waiting for you, perhaps.

Mr. B. (rising to go.) Perhaps so. Saw me come in, maybe.

Mrs. B. (going.) Good-bye for the present, Miss Bella. We shall meet again soon.

Mr. B. 'Mornin', 'mornin'! (*Exit MR. and MRS. BOFFIN, L.*)

Lavvy. There, Bella! At last I hope you have got your wishes realized by your Boffins! You'll be rich enough now *with* your Boffins! You can have as much flirting as you like *at* your Boffins! But you won't take *me* to your Boffins, I can tell you! You and your Boffins too!

Geo. S. (taking cane from his mouth.) If Miss Bella's Mr. Boffin comes any more of his nonsense to *me*, I only wish him to understand, as betwixt man and man, that he does it at his per—

(*LAVVY jerks his cane in again forcibly.*)

Mrs. W. Of their manners I say nothing. Of their appearance I say nothing. Of the disinterestedness of their intentions towards Bella I say nothing. But the *craft*, the *secrecy*, the dark, deep, underhanded plotting written in Mrs. Boffin's countenance, make me shudder. (*Exeunt MRS. W., LAVVY, and GEO. S., R.*)

Bella, (taking a book, and throwing herself into a chair, R.) If there is anything *ma* delights in, it is in making us all seem ridiculous before strangers. But I mean to go and live with that dear old Mrs. Boffin! I know I shall love her!

Enter ROKESMITH, L., and stands silently.

And then I shall escape all this poverty and misery, and having to take in suspicious lodgers—

Roke. (interrupting.) I beg your pardon, Miss Wilfer, but I—

Bella. Eh? Oh, it's you, is it?

Roke. Only I. A—fine—morning.

Bella. Is it? I was not thinking of the morning.

Roke. So intent upon your book?

Bella (confused.) Yes.

Roke. A love story, Miss Wilfer?

Bella. Oh dear, no, or I shouldn't be reading it. It's more about money than anything else.

Roke. And does it say that money is better than anything?

Bella (throwing down the book.) Upon my word, I forget what it says, but you can find out for yourself if you like. I don't want it any more.

Roke. I am charged with a message for you, Miss Wilfer.

Bella. Impossible, I think!

Roke. From Mrs. Boffin. She desired me to say to you (what she forgot), that she will be ready to receive you in another week, or two at furthest. You do not know, perhaps, Miss Wilfer, that I am Mr. Boffin's Secretary.

Bella. I'm as wise as ever, for I don't know what a Secretary is. Not that it signifies.

Roke. Not at all.

Bella. Then are you going to be always there, Mr. Rokesmith?

Roke. Always? No. Very much there? Yes.

Bella. Dear me!

Roke. But my position there as Secretary, will be very different from yours as guest. You will know little, or nothing about me. I shall transact the business; you will transact the pleasure. I shall have my salary to earn; you will have nothing to do but to enjoy and attract.

Bella. Attract, sir? I don't understand you.

Roke. Excuse me. Since I have become entrusted with Mr. Boffin's affairs I have naturally come to understand the obligation he feels towards you, and the deep interest he takes in your welfare. I venture to remark, that much of your loss may be repaired. I speak, of course, merely of wealth, Miss Wilfer. The loss of a perfect stranger, whose worth, or worthlessness, I cannot estimate — nor you either — is beside the question. But this excellent gentleman and lady are so full of simplicity, so full of generosity, so inclined towards you, and so desirous to — how shall I express it? — to make amends for their good fortune, that you have only to respond. I take the liberty of saying these few words. You don't consider them intrusive, I hope?

Bella. Really, Mr. Rokesmith, I can't say what I consider them. They are perfectly new to me, and may be founded altogether on your own imagination.

Roke. You will see.

Re-enter MRS. W., R.

Roke. I have been telling Miss Wilfer that I have become, by a curious chance, Mr. Boffin's Secretary, or man of business,

Mrs. W. I have not the honor of any intimate acquaintance with Mr. Boffin, and it is not for me to congratulate that gentleman on the acquisition he has made.

Roke. A poor one enough.

Mrs. W. Pardon me; the merits of Mr. Boffin may be highly distinguished — may be more distinguished than the countenance of Mrs. Boffin would imply — but it were the insanity of humility to deem him worthy of a better assistant.

Roke. You are very good. I have also been telling Miss Wilfer that she is expected very shortly at the new residence in town.

Mrs. W. Having tacitly consented to my child's acceptance of the proffered attentions of Mrs. Boffin, I interpose no objection.

Bella. Don't talk nonsense, ma, please.

Mrs. W. Peace!

Bella. No, ma, I am not going to be made so absurd. Interposing objections!

Mrs. W. (*very grandly.*) I say that I am *not* going to interpose objections. If Mrs. Boffin (to whose countenance no disciple of Lavater could possibly for a single moment subscribe) seeks to illuminate her new residence with the attractions of a child of mine, I am content that she should be favored by the company of a child of mine.

Roke. You use the word, ma'am, I have myself used, when you speak of Miss Wilfer's attractions there.

Mrs. W. Pardon me, but I had not finished.

Roke. Pray excuse me.

Mrs. W. I was about to say, that when I use the term attractions, I do so with the qualification that I do not mean it in any way whatever.

Bella. Quite enough about this, I am sure, on all sides. Have the goodness, Mr. Rokesmith, to give my love to Mrs. Boffin —

Mrs. W. Pardon me! Compliments.

Bella. Love!

Mrs. W. No! Compliments.

Roke. Say Miss Wilfer's love, and Mrs. Wilfer's compliments.

Bella. And I shall be very glad to come when she is ready for me. The sooner the better.

Mrs. W. One last word, Bella, before descending to the family apartment. I trust that, as a child of mine, you will ever be sensible that it will be graceful in you, when associating with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin upon equal terms, to remember that the Secretary, Mr. Rokesmith, as your father's lodger, has a claim on your good word.

(*Exeunt BELLA and MRS. W., R.*)

Roke. (alone.) So insolent, so trivial, so capricious, so mercenary, so careless, so hard to touch, so hard to turn! And yet so pretty, so pretty! And if she knew!

(*Exit slowly L.*)

Act Drop.

ACT II.

SCENE. — *Drawing-room in Mr. Boffin's mansion; clock on mantel; long mirror, C.; plants and flowers in background. Doors R., L., and C.*

Enter BELLA in riding-habit, C.

Bella. I could endure that hateful ride no longer. I must see Mr. Rokesmith to-day, and I've sent for him to meet me here. Telling me of my duty to my family, indeed! Setting himself up as my adviser! I have a right to be rude to him! (*Takes off her hat and gloves, and sits in arm-chair by a small table, R.*)

Enter MR. BOFFIN, L.

Mr. B. Ah, Bella my dear, back again! That's right; "enjoy each day while yet you may," as says my literary man *with* a wooden leg.

Bella. He must be a queer man, sir.

Mr. B. He is, my dear; a regular slasher at poetry. Why, I'll tell you how he lapsed into it one day nearly every other line. Want to hear it, my dear?

Bella. Yes, do say it.

Mr. B. (repeating mechanically.)

"I'll tell thee how the maiden wept, Mrs. Boffin,

When her true love was slain, ma'am,

And how her broken spirit slept, Mrs. Boffin,

And never woke again, ma'am.

I'll tell thee (if agreeable to Mr. Boffin) how the steed drew nigh,

And left his lord afar:

And if my tale (which I hope Mr. Boffin might excuse) should make you sigh,

I'll strike the light guitar."

The poem was to me and Mrs. Boffin, and I consider that it brings us both in, in a beautiful manner. I got Rokesmith to make a copy of it, and the old lady thinks of having it framed. By the way, you've no idea what an amount of work that Secretary does, Bella, my dear. He takes such wonderful care of my affairs. And yet, somehow, I can't make him out.

Bella. May I ask why, sir?

Mr. B. Well, my dear, he won't meet any company here but you. When we have visitors, I should wish him to have his regular place at the table, like ourselves; but no, he won't take it.

Bella. If he considers himself above it, I should leave him alone.

Mr. B. It ain't that, my dear. He don't consider himself above it.

Bella. Perhaps he considers himself beneath it. If so, he ought to know best.

Mr. B. No, it ain't that neither. Rokesmith's a modest man, but he don't consider himself beneath it.

Bella. Then what does he consider, sir?

Mr. B. Dashed if I know! It seemed at first as if it was only the lawyer he objected to meet, but now it seems to be everybody except you.

Bella (rising and walking up c.) Indeed! *That's* it, then! Rather cool, I think, in a Secretary and pa's lodger, to make me the subject of his jealousy and keep eligible people off!

Mr. B. (aside.) Oho, that's it, is it? Well, my lady, we must bring you round.

Enter ROKESMITH, L.

(aloud.) Here's Rokesmith now. Good bye, my dear. Now's a good chance to tell him what you think of him. Put it to him strong, Bella, my dear. Ha, ha! *(Exit L.)*

Bella (turning.) Mr. Rokesmith, I wanted to say something to you when I could have the opportunity. You have no right to think ill of me, sir.

Roke. You don't know how well I think of you, Miss Wilfer.

Bella (sitting.) Truly, you must have a very high opinion of me, Mr. Rokesmith, when you believe that in prosperity I neglect and forget my old home.

Roke. Do I believe so?

Bella. You *did*, sir, at any rate.

Roke. I took the liberty of reminding you of a little omission into which you had fallen — insensibly and naturally fallen. It was no more than that.

Bella. And I beg leave to ask you, Mr. Rokesmith, why you took that liberty? — I hope there is no offence in the phrase? it is your own, remember.

Roke. Because I am truly, deeply, profoundly interested in you, Miss Wilfer. Because I wish to see you always at your best. Because I — shall I go on?

Bella. No, sir; you have said more than enough. I beg that you will *not* go on. If you have any generosity, any honor, you will say no more. I wish to speak to you, sir, once for all, and I don't know how to do it. I beg for a moment's time. *(After a pause.)* You know how I am situated here, sir, and you know how I am situated at home. I must speak to you for myself, since there is no one about me whom I could ask to do so. It is not generous in you, it is not honorable in you, to conduct yourself towards me as you do.

Roke. Is it ungenerous or dishonorable to be devoted to you; fascinated by you?

Bella. Preposterous!

Roke. I now feel obliged to go on, though it were only in self-explanation and self-defence. I hope, Miss Wilfer, that it is not unpardonable — even in me — to make an honest declaration of an honest devotion to you.

Bella. An honest declaration!

Roke. Is it otherwise?

Bella. I must request, sir, that I may not be questioned. You must excuse me if I decline to be cross-examined.

Roke. Oh, Miss Wilfer, this is hardly charitable. I ask you nothing but what your own emphasis suggests. However, I waive even that question. But what I have declared, I take my stand by. I cannot recall the avowal of my earnest and deep attachment to you, and I do not recall it.

Bella. I reject it, sir.

Roke. I should be blind and deaf if I were not prepared for the reply. Forgive my offence, for it carries its punishment with it.

Bella. What punishment?

Roke. Is my present endurance none? But excuse me; I did not mean to cross-examine you again.

Bella. You take advantage of a hasty word of mine to make me seem — I don't know what. I spoke without consideration when I used it. If that was bad, I am sorry; but you repeat it after consideration, and that seems to me to be at least no better. For the rest, I beg it may be understood, Mr. Rokesmith, that there is an end of this between us, now and for ever.

Roke. Now and for ever.

Bella. Yes. I appeal to you, sir, not to pursue me. I appeal to you not to take advantage of your position in this house to make my position in it distressing and disagreeable. I appeal to you to discontinue your habit of making your misplaced attentions as plain to Mrs. Boffin as to me.

Roke. Have I done so?

Bella. I should think you have. In any case, it is not your fault if you have not, Mr. Rokesmith.

Roke. I hope you are wrong in that impression. I should be very sorry to have justified it. I think I have not. For the future there is no apprehension. It is all over.

Bella. I am much relieved to hear it. I have far other views in life, and why should you waste your own?

Roke. Mine! My life! Pardon me, Miss Wilfer; you have used some hard words, for which I do not doubt you have a justification in your mind, that I do not understand. Ungenerous and dishonorable. In what?

Bella. I would rather not be asked.

Roke. I would rather not ask, but the question is imposed upon me. Kindly explain; or if not kindly, justly.

Bella. Oh, sir! is it generous and honorable to use the power here which your favor with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin and your ability in your place give you, against me?

Roke. Against you?

Bella. Is it generous and honorable to form a plan for gradually bringing their influence to bear upon a suit which I have shown you that I do not like, and which I tell you that I utterly reject? Would it be generous and honorable to step into your place—if you did so, for I don't know that you did, and I hope you did not—anticipating, or knowing beforehand, that I should come here, and designing to take me at this disadvantage?

Roke. This mean and cruel disadvantage!

Bella. Yes.

Roke. You are wholly mistaken, Miss Wilfer; wonderfully mistaken.

Bella (rising.) At least, sir, you know the history of my being here at all. And was it not enough that I should have been willed away like a horse, or a dog, or a bird; but must you too begin to dispose of me in your mind, and speculate in me, as soon as I had ceased to be the talk and the laugh of the town? Am I for ever to be made the property of strangers?

Roke. Believe me, you are wonderfully mistaken.

Bella. I should be glad to know it.

Roke. I doubt if you ever will. Good-night. Of course I shall be careful to conceal any traces of this interview from Mr. and Mrs. Boffin while I remain here. Trust me, what you have complained of is at an end for ever.

Bella. I am glad I have spoken then, Mr. Rokesmith. It has been painful and difficult, but it is done. If I have hurt you, I hope you will forgive me. I am inexperienced and impetuous, and I have been a little spoiled, but I really am not so bad as I dare say I appear, or as you may think me. (*Exit ROKESMITH, L.*) I didn't know the lovely woman could be such a dragon. (*Going to the mirror.*) You have positively been swelling your features, you little fool! I wish pa was here to talk about avaricious marriages, but he is better away, poor dear, for I know I should pull his hair if he was here. (*A pause.*) He has no right to any power over me, and how do I come to mind him, when I don't care for him? Pa's lodger and a Secretary! indeed! (*Sits L.*)

Enter B. MRS. WILFER, followed by LAVVY and GEO. S. arm-in-arm. They advance slowly towards BELLA.

Lavvy (pointing out objects in the room to GEORGE.) Exotics, George. An Ormolu clock, George. An Aviary beyond, George.

Bella (rising as she notes their approach.) Why, ma, is this

you? And here is Lavvy too! and George Sampson! How do you do, all? Ma, you shall have this very best chair, Mrs. Boffin's own favorite. (*Pushes arm-chair towards MRS. W.*)

Mrs. W. Pardon me! It were not fitting for me to occupy Mrs. Boffin's magnificent reclining couch, coming as we do from the abode of conscious though independent poverty. (*Crosses to L. and sits on a high stool.*) This is quite an honor for us. You will probably find your sister Lavinia grown, Bella.

Lavvy (*who has been examining the room, suddenly comes forward.*) Ma, I really must request that you will not drag in such ridiculous nonsense as my having grown when I am past the growing age.

Mrs. W. I grew myself after I was married.

Lavvy. Very well, ma, then I think you had much better have left it alone.

George S. To be sure, certainly.

Lavvy. I suppose you won't consider yourself quite disgraced, Bella, if I give you a kiss? Well! (*Sitting R., with GEO. S. by her side.*) And how do you do, Bella? And how are your Boffins?

Mrs. W. Hold! I will not suffer this tone of levity.

Lavvy. My goodness me! How are your Spoffins, then? since ma so very much objects to your Boffins.

Mrs. W. Impertinent girl! Minx!

Lavvy. I don't care whether I'm a Minx, or a Sphinx; it's exactly the same thing to me, and I'd every bit as soon be one as the other; but I know this — I'll not grow after I am married!

Geo. S. No, certainly not.

Mrs. W. You will not? You will not?

Lavvy. No, ma, I will not. Nothing shall induce me.

Mrs. W. It was to be expected. A child of mine deserts me for the proud and prosperous, and another child of mine despises me. It is quite fitting.

Bella. Ma, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin are prosperous, no doubt; but you have no right to say they are proud. You must know very well that they are not.

Lavvy. In short, ma, you must know very well — or if you don't, more shame for you! — that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin are just absolute perfection.

Mrs. W. Truly, it would seem that we are required to think so. And this, Lavinia, is my reason for objecting to a tone of levity. Mrs. Boffin (of whose physiognomy I can never speak with the composure I would desire to preserve) and your mother are not on terms of intimacy.

Lavvy. After all, you know, Bella, you haven't told us how your Whats-his-names are.

Bella. I don't want to speak of them. They are much too kind and too good to be drawn into these discussions.

Mrs. W. Why put it so? Why adopt a circuitous form of speech? It is polite and it is obliging; but why do it? Why not

openly say that they are much too kind and too good for *us*? We understand the allusion. Why disguise the phrase?

Bella. Ma, you are enough to drive a saint mad; and so is Lavvy!

Mrs. W. Unfortunate Lavvy! She always comes in for it. My poor child!

Lavvy. Don't patronize *me*, ma, because I can take care of myself.

Mrs. W. (to Bella.) I only wonder that you find time and inclination to tear yourself from Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, and come to see us at all. I shall expect you but seldom.

Bella. Ma, I think you are too bad, and so is Lavvy. Pa is too magnanimous to feel envy and spite towards my generous friends, and pa is delicate enough and gentle enough to remember the sort of little claim they thought I had upon them. And I always did love poor dear pa better than all the rest of you put together, and I always do, and I always shall! (*Bursts into tears.*)

Mrs. W. (raising her eyes to heaven.) Fate has spared you this, R. W., whatever it may have thought proper to inflict upon me. (*Bursts into tears.*)

Lavvy, (walking around excitedly.) I hate the Boffins! I don't care who objects to their being called the Boffins. I WILL call 'em the Boffins. And I say they are mischief-making Boffins, and I say the Boffins have set Bella against me, and I tell the Boffins to their faces, that they are detestable Boffins, disreputable Boffins, odious Boffins, beastly Boffins. There! (*Flings herself into a chair and weeps.*)

George S. (rising.) What I mean to say is, Why do you take me to the glittering halls with which I can never compete, and then taunt me with my moderate salary! Is it generous? Is it kind? Bear with a wretch, Lavinia, bear with a wretch, ma'am, who feels the noble sacrifice you make for him (*slaps his forehead*), but is goaded almost to madness when he thinks of competing with the rich and influential. (*Falls on his knees at LAVVY's feet and weeps.*)

Act Drop, (quick.)

ACT III.

SCENE I. — *Same as Act II.*

MR. and MRS. BOFFIN *discovered sitting together on a sofa, &c.*

Mr. B. And so that is the secret, is it, old lady?

Mrs. B. Yes, Noddy; and to think that he is our own little John Harmon, our own little boy that we watched and tended; and he so sad and sorrowful, and we never to know.

Mr. B. But how did you find him out, tell me now?

Mrs. B. O, when I looked in last night and saw him sitting lonely by the fire, so sad, so lonely, after what our Bella had been saying to him, every grain of the gunpowder that had been lying sprinkled thick about him ever since I first set eyes on him when he came to be your Secretary, took fire, and I knew him. Too many times I'd seen him when he was a poor child, sitting, lonely, to be pitied heart and hand. I just made out to cry, "I know you now, you're John!" (*Laughs and cries at once.*)

Mr. B. Well, well, old lady, it's all right now. He's come to life again, and shall have his money back and be happy.

Mrs. B. But he won't take it, Noddy.

Mr. B. O, that's all a notion. It's all because — now I've got a secret to tell *you*, old lady. Rokesmith —

Mrs. B. (*interrupting.*) My little John Harmon.

Mr. B. Yes, our John Harmon, old lady, only he will call himself otherwise. Well, he's in love with our Bella, and now I've got a plan to make her fall in love with him. Don't you see?

Mrs. B. Bless her dear little heart, Noddy; I think she loves him now, only she don't know it herself.

Mr. B. But she has refused him. She wants to marry money. She has mighty grand ideas!

Mrs. B. Bless you, that's all a notion, Noddy, that's all a notion.

Mr. B. Well, I've got a notion too. You know how I've been treating him of late on purpose to make her take his part. Now, to-day we shall see. I'll go it stronger. I'll be a regular old grisly growler.

Mrs. B. Don't be too hard, Noddy my love.

Mr. B. (*rising and walking about.*) Yes I shall. I'll be a brown bear, a regular old grim one. Now, old lady, you mustn't spoil it all. Come, put on a sober face, for here comes Bella.

Enter BELLA, R.

Mr. B. Don't be alarmed, Bella, my dear. I'll see you righted.

Bella. See me righted, sir?

Mr. B. (drawing her hand through his arm.) Ay, ay! See you righted.

Enter ROKESMITH, L.

Mr. B. Shut the door, sir! I have got something to say to you which I fancy you'll not be pleased to hear.

Roke. I am sorry to reply, Mr. Boffin, that I think that very likely.

Mr. B. What do you mean?

Roke. I mean that it has become no novelty to me to hear from your lips what I would rather not hear.

Mr. B. Oh! perhaps we shall change that.

Roke. I hope so.

Mr. B. Now, sir, look at this young lady on my arm.

Roke. I do so.

Mr. B. How dare you, sir, tamper, unknown to me, with this young lady? How dare you pester this young lady with your impudent addresses?

Roke. I must decline to answer questions that are so offensively asked.

Mr. B. You decline to answer, do you? Then I'll tell you what it is, Rokesmith; I'll answer for you. There are two sides to this matter, and I'll take 'em separately. The first side is, sheer Insolence. That's the first side. It was sheer Insolence in you even to think of this young lady. This young lady was far above *you*. This young lady was no match for *you*. This young lady was lying in wait for money, and you had no money. What are you, I should like to know, that you were to have the audacity to follow up this young lady? This young lady was looking about the market for a good bid; she wasn't in it to be snapped up by fellows that had no money to lay out; nothing to buy with.

Bella, (going quickly to Mrs. Boffin.) Oh, Mr. Boffin! Mrs. Boffin, pray say something for me! *(Mrs. B. weeps.)*

Mr. B. Old lady, you hold your tongue. Bella, my dear, don't you let yourself be put out. I'll right you.

Bella. But you don't, you don't right me! You wrong me!

Mr. B. Don't you be put out, my dear. Now, you Rokesmith! You hear me tell you that the first side of your conduct was Insolence — Insolence and Presumption. Answer me one thing, if you can. Didn't this young lady tell you so herself?

Bella, (burying her face in her hands.) Did I, Mr. Rokesmith? O say, Mr. Rokesmith! Did I?

Roke. Don't be distressed, Miss Wilfer; it matters very little now.

Mr. B. Ah! You can't deny it, though!

Bella. But I have asked him to forgive me since; and I would ask him to forgive me now again, upon my knees, if it would spare him. *(Mrs. B. bursts into tears.)*

Mr. B. Old lady, stop that noise ! Tender-hearted in you, Miss **Bella.** Now, you Rokesmith, I tell you that's one side of your conduct — Insolence and Presumption. Now, I'm a-coming to the other, which is much worse. This was a speculation of yours.

Roke. I indignantly deny it.

Mr. B. It's of no use your denying it ; I've got a head upon my shoulders, and it ain't a baby's. What ! Don't I know what grabs are made at a man with money ? If I didn't keep my eyes open, and my pockets buttoned, shouldn't I be brought to the workhouse before I knew where I was ? I'm agoing to unfold your plan before this young lady ; I'm agoing to show this young lady the second view of you ; and nothing you can say will stave it off. (*Bella sinks into a chair and hides her face.*) Now, attend here, Bella my dear. Rokesmith, you're a needy chap. You're a chap that I pick up in the street. Are you, or ain't you ?

Roke. Go on, Mr. Boffin ; don't appeal to me.

Mr. B. Not appeal to *you* ! No, I should hope not ! Appealing to *you*, would be rather a rum course. You come and ask me in the street to take you for a Secretary, and I take you. Very good.

Roke. Very bad.

Mr. B. What do you say ? This Rokesmith is a needy young man that I take for my Secretary out of the open street. This Rokesmith gets acquainted with my affairs, and gets to know that I mean to settle a sum of money on this young lady. "Oho !" says this Rokesmith ; "this will be a good haul ; I'll go in for this !" But fortunately she was too many for him, and a pretty figure he cuts now he is exposed. There he stands ! Look at him !

Roke. Your unfortunate suspicions, Mr. Boffin —

Mr. B. Precious unfortunate for *you*, I can tell you.

Roke. —are not to be combated by any one, and I address myself to no such hopeless task. But I will say a word upon the truth.

Mr. B. (*snapping his fingers.*) Yah ! Much you care about the truth.

Mrs. B. Noddy ! My dear love !

Mr. B. Old lady, you keep still. I tell him again, much he cares about the truth.

Roke. Our connection being at an end, Mr. Boffin, it can be of very little moment to me what you say.

Mr. B. Oh ! You are knowing enough to have found out that our connection's at an end, eh ? But you can't get beforehand with me. Look at this in my hand. This is your pay, on your discharge. You can only follow suit. You can't deprive me of the lead. Let's have no pretending that you discharge yourself. I discharge you.

Roke. So that I go, it is all one to me.

Mr. B. Is it ? But it's two to me, let me tell you. Old lady, don't you cut in. You keep still.

Roke. Have you said all you wish to say to me ?

Mr. B. I don't know whether I have or not. It depends.

Roke. Perhaps you will consider whether there are any other strong expressions that you would like to bestow upon me?

Mr. B. I'll consider that at my convenience, and not at yours.

Mrs. B. Noddy! My dear, dear Noddy! You sound so hard!

Mr. B. Old lady, if you cut in when requested not, I'll get a pillow and carry you out of the room upon it. What do you want to say, you Rokesmith?

Roke. To you, Mr. Boffin, nothing. But to Miss Wilfer and to your good kind wife, a word.

Mr. B. Out with it then, and cut it short, for we've had enough of you.

Roke. I have borne with my false position here, that I might not be separated from Miss Wilfer. Since Miss Wilfer rejected me I have never again urged my suit, to the best of my belief, with a spoken syllable or a look. But I have never changed in my devotion to her, except—if she will forgive my saying so—that it is deeper than it was, and better founded.

Mr. B. Now, mark this chap's saying, Miss Wilfer, when he means Pounds, Shillings, and Pence!

Roke. My interest in Miss Wilfer began when I first saw her; even began when I had only heard of her. It was, in fact, the cause of my throwing myself in Mr. Boffin's way, and entering his service. Miss Wilfer has never known this until now.

Mr. B. Now, this is a very artful dog. This is a longer-headed schemer than I thought him. See how patiently and methodically he goes to work. He says to himself, "I'll get in with Boffin, and I'll get in with this young lady, and I'll work 'em both at the same time, and I'll bring my pigs to market somewhere." I hear him say it, bless you! Why, I look at him now, and I see him say it! But luckily he hadn't to deal with the people he supposed, Bella my dear! And he's beat, that's what he is; regularly beat. He thought to squeeze money out of us, and he has done for himself instead, Bella my dear! There's your pay, Rokesmith, (*throwing money on the floor.*) I dare say you can stoop to pick it up, after what you have stooped to here.

Roke. I have stooped to nothing but this; and this is mine, for I have earned it by the hardest of hard labor.

Mr. B. You're a pretty quick packer, I hope; because the sooner you are gone, bag and baggage, the better for all parties.

Roke. You need have no fear of my lingering.

Mr. B. You *pretend* to have a mighty admiration for this young lady?

Roke. I do not pretend.

Mr. B. Oh! Well. You *have* a mighty admiration for this young lady—since you are so particular?

Roke. Yes.

Mr. B. How do you reconcile that, with this young lady's fling.

ng up her money to the church-weathercocks, and racing off at a spitting pace for the workhouse?

Roke. I don't understand you.

Mr. B. Don't you? Or won't you? What else could you have made this young lady out to be, if she had listened to such addresses as yours?

Roke. What else, if I had been so happy as to win her affections and possess her heart!

Mr. B. Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew says the cat, Quack-quack says the duck, Bow-wow-wow says the dog! Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew, Quack-quack, Bow-wow! What is due to this young lady is Money, and this young lady right well knows it.

Roke. You slander the young lady.

Mr. B. You slander the young lady; you with your affections and hearts and trumpery. You and your affections and hearts are a Lie, sir!

Roke. Mrs. Boffin, for your delicate and unvarying kindness I thank you with the warmest gratitude. Good-bye! Miss Wilfer, good-bye!

Mr. B. And now, my dear, I hope you feel that you've been righted!

Bella, (starting up.) O Mr. Rokesmith, before you go, if you could but make me poor again! Oh! Make me poor again, somebody, I beg and pray, or my heart will break if this goes on! Pa dear, make me poor again and take me home! I was bad enough there, but I have been so much worse here. Don't give me money, Mr. Boffin, I won't have money. Keep it away from me, and only let me speak to good little pa, and lay my head upon his shoulder, and tell him all my griefs. Nobody else can understand me, nobody else can comfort me, nobody else knows how unworthy I am, and yet can love me like a little child. I am better with pa than any one — more innocent, more sorry, more glad! (*Throws herself at Mrs. Boffin's feet, weeping.*)

Mr. B. There, my dear, there. You are righted; and it's all right.

Bella. I hate you! At least, I can't hate you, but I don't like you.

Mr. B. Hullo!

Bella, (rising.) You are a scolding, unjust, abusive, aggravating, bad old creature. I am angry with my ungrateful self for calling you such names, but you are! You are! You know you are! I have heard you with shame! — shame for myself, and shame for you. You ought to be above the base tale-bearing of a time-serving creature, but you are above nothing now. When I came here I honored you and respected you, and I soon loved you. But now I can't bear the sight of you. At least, I don't know as I ought to go so far as that — only — you're a monster! The best wish I can

wish you is that you hadn't a single farthing in the world. If any true friend could make you a bankrupt you would be a duck, but as a man of property you're a—demon. Mr. Rokesmith, pray stay one moment. Pray hear one word from me before you go. I am deeply sorry for the reproaches you have borne on my account. Out of the depths of my heart I earnestly and truly beg your pardon
(*Gives her hand.*)

Roke. God bless you !

Bella. Mr. Boffin's speeches were detestable to me, shocking to me. It is quite true that there was a time when I deserved to be so righted, but I hope that I shall never deserve it again.

(*ROKE. raises her hand to his lips, and exits L.*)

Bella. He has gone. He has been most shamefully treated, and most unjustly and basely driven away, and I am the cause of it. I must go home. I am very grateful to you for all you have done for me, but I cannot stay here.

Mrs. B. My darling girl !

Bella. No, I cannot stay here. Oh, you vicious old thing !

Mrs. B. Don't be rash, my love. Think well of what you do.

Mr. B. Yes, you had better think well of what you do.

Bella. I shall never more think well of *you*. And, what is more, you're wholly undeserving of the Gentleman you have lost.

Mr. B. Why, you don't mean to say, Miss Bella, that you set up Rokesmith against me ?

Bella. I do ! He is worth a Million of you. I would rather he thought well of me, though he swept the street for bread, than that you did, though you splashed the mud upon him from the wheels of a chariot of pure gold—There !

Mr. B. Well, I'm sure !

Bella. And for a long time past, when you have thought you set yourself above him, I have only seen you under his feet—There ! And throughout I saw in him the master, and I saw in you the man—There ! And when you used him shamefully, I took his part and loved him—There ! I boast of it. (*Throws herself into a chair, and cries.*)

Mr. B. Now look here. Give me your attention, Bella. I am not angry.

Bella. I am !

Mr. B. I say I am not angry, and I mean kindly to you, and I want to overlook this. So you'll stay where you are, and we'll agree to say no more about it.

Bella (rising hurriedly.) No, I can't stay here ; I can't think of staying here. I must go home for good.

Mr. B. Now don't be silly ; don't do what you're sure to be sorry for.

Bella. I shall *never* be sorry for it ; and I *should* always be sorry, and should every minute of my life despise myself, if I remained here after what has happened.

Mr. B. At least, Bella, let there be no mistake about it. Look before you leap, you know. Stay where you are, and all's well, and all's as it was to be. Go away, and you can never come back.

Bella. I know that I can never come back, and that's what I mean.

Mr. B. You mustn't expect that I'm agoing to settle money on you if you leave us like this, because I am not. No, Bella! Be careful! Not one brass farthing.

Bella. Expect! Do you think that any power on earth could make me take it, if you did, sir? (*Goes to Mrs. B. and falls on her knees before her.*) You're a dear, a dear, the best of dears! I can never be thankful enough to you, and can never forget you. If I should live to be blind and deaf, I know I shall see and hear you, in my fancy, to the last of my dim old days!

Mrs. B. My dear girl! My darling girl! My sweet pretty!

Bella (*rising and going to Mr. B.*) I am very glad that I called you names, sir, because you richly deserved it. But I am very sorry that I called you names, because you used to be so different. Say good-bye!

Mr. B. Good-bye.

Bella. If I knew which of your hands was the least spoiled, I would ask you to let me touch it, for the last time.

Mr. B. Try the left hand; it's the least used.

Bella (*taking his hand.*) You have been wonderfully good and kind to me, and I kiss it for that. You have been as bad as bad could be to Mr. Rokesmith, and I throw it away for that. Thank you for myself, and good-bye!

Mr. B. Good-bye. (*BELLA kisses him suddenly, embraces Mrs. B., and runs out L.*)

Mr. B. (*slapping his knees and laughing.*) Ha, ha! What do you think of me now, old lady? Wasn't I a regular old brown one?

Mrs. B. (*wiping her eyes.*) O Noddy, you was so hard.

Mr. B. Of course I was, old lady; but didn't I bring her round? Ha, ha! (*Imitating BELLA.*) "You're a monster! and I never again shall think well of you!" Didn't she put it to me, old lady? (*Imitating as before.*) "I hate you!" Ha, ha! Didn't she look pretty, and didn't her little eyes snap and her little feet beat the floor? I tell you, old lady, we've done a glorious day's work.

Mrs. B. But we've lost her for ever, Noddy.

Mr. B. Not a bit of it. *She* thinks so, no doubt. But I tell you it'll be all right before we know it. Wasn't I a grisly old growler, though? I knew she'd come through it true golden gold, and she has. Now she'll run home and John will go after her, and they'll both be happy, and we'll be happy too, old lady, and bide our time. This is the happiest piece of work we've ever done, old lady, I'll be bound. (*Seizes Mrs. B. round the waist and dances with her about the room and out through the entrance C.*)

SCENE II. — *A dingy office. Desks, stools, &c. Doors R. and L. Window C. R. W. seated at desk, R. C., eating bread and milk.*

R. W. I wonder if my little Bella is really enjoying herself with all her riches and elegance. (*Sighs.*) When she comes to see her poor, shabby old father, she looks so lovely and is dressed so beautifully that I feel almost afraid she'll forget us all one of these days, after she marries the enormously wealthy husband that she talks so much about. Well, well, poor old Rumty will be sorry to lose his lovely woman, for she's a very sweet and dear little woman in spite of her mercenary ideas. God bless her! (*Bella runs in L., seizes*

R. W. round the neck and kisses him heartily.)

Bella There, dear pa, how do you like that?

R. W. (breathlessly.) Very much, my dear. But, my dear, I never was so surprised! The idea of your coming down the lane yourself. Why didn't you send the footman down the lane, my love?

Bella (sitting by his side.) I have brought no footman with me, pa.

R. W. Oh, indeed! But you have brought the elegant turnout, my love?

Bella. No, pa.

R. W. You never can have walked, my dear?

Bella. Yes, I have, pa.

R. W. The idea of a splendid —

Bella. What's the matter, pa?

R. W. — of a splendid female putting up with such accommodation as the present. Is that a new dress you have on, dear?

Bella. No, pa, an old one. Don't you remember it?

R. W. Why, I *thought* I remembered it, my dear!

Bella. You should, for you bought it, pa?

R. W. Yes, I *thought* I bought it, my dear!

Bella. And have you grown so fickle that you don't like your own taste, pa dear?

R. W. Well, my love, I should have thought it was hardly sufficiently splendid for existing circumstances.

Bella. And so, pa, you sometimes have a quiet tea here all alone? I am not in the tea's way, if I draw my arm over your shoulder like this, pa?

R. W. Yes, my dear; and no, my dear. Yes to the first question, and Certainly Not to the second. Respecting the quiet tea, my dear, why you see the occupations of the day are sometimes a little wearing; and if there's nothing interposed between the day and your mother, why *she* is sometimes a little wearing too.

Bella. I know, pa.

R. W. Yes, my dear. So sometimes I put a quiet tea at the win-

Now here, with a little quiet contemplation of the Lane (which comes soothing), between the day, and domestic —

Bella. Bliss.

R. W. And domestic Bliss.

Bella. And it is in this dark dingy place of captivity, poor dear, that you pass all the hours of your life when you are not at home?

R. W. Not at home, or not on the road there, or on the road here, my love. Yes. You see that little desk in the corner?

Bella. In the dark corner, farthest both from the light and from the fireplace? The shabbiest desk of all the desks!

R. W. Now, does it really strike you in that point of view, my dear? That's mine. That's called Rumty's Perch.

Bella (indignantly.) Whose Perch?

R. W. Rumty's. You see, being rather high and up two steps, they call it a Perch. And they call me Rumty.

Bella. How dare they!

R. W. They're playful, Bella my dear; they're playful. They're more or less younger than I am, and they're playful. What does it matter? I might be Surly, or Sulky, or fifty disagreeable things that I really shouldn't like to be considered. But Rumty! Lor, why not Rumty? (*Resumes eating.*)

Bella (after a pause.) Pa dear, don't be cast down, but I must tell you something disagreeable.

R. W. (not heeding BELLA.) My gracious me! This is very extraordinary.

Bella. What is, pa?

R. W. (looking out of window.) Why here's Mr. Rokesmith now!

Bella. No, no, pa, no; surely not.

R. W. Yes, there he is! Look here!

Enter ROKESMITH, L. He comes forward quickly, and as BELLA rises, catches her in his arms.

Roke. My dear, dear girl; my gallant, generous, disinterested, courageous, noble girl! (*BELLA lays her head on his shoulder.*) I knew you would come to him, and I followed you. My love, my life! You ARE mine?

Bella. Yes, I AM yours, if you think me worth taking. (*A pause.*) But we must think of dear pa. I haven't told dear pa: let us speak to pa.

R. W. (faintly.) I wish first, my dear, that you'd have the kindness to sprinkle me with a little milk, for I feel as if I was — Grring.

Bella (kisses R. W. and makes him drink some milk.) We'll break it to you gently, dearest pa.

R. W. My dear, you broke so much in the first — Gush, if I may so express myself — that I think I am equal to a good large breakage now.

Roke. Mr. Wilfer, Bella takes me, though I have no fortune, even no present occupation; nothing but what I can get in the life before us. Bella takes me! (*Embraces her.*)

R. W. Yes, I should rather have inferred, my dear sir, that Bella took you, from what I have within these few minutes remarked.

Bella. You don't know, pa, how ill I have used him!

Roke. You don't know, sir, what a heart she has!

Bella. You don't know, pa, what a shocking creature I was growing, when he saved me from myself!

Roke. You don't know, sir, what a sacrifice she has made for me!

R. W. My dear Bella, and my dear John Rokesmith, if you will allow me so to call you —

Bella. Yes do, pa, do! I allow you, and my will is his law. Isn't it — dear John Rokesmith? (*ROKE. embraces BELLA again.*)

R. W. I think, my dears, that if you could make it convenient to sit one on one side of me, and the other on the other, we should get on rather more consecutively, and make things rather plainer. (*They sit one on each side of R. W.*) John Rokesmith mentioned, a while ago, that he had no present occupation.

Roke. None.

Bella. No, pa, none.

R. W. From which I argue that he has left Mr. Boffin.

Bella. Yes, pa. And so —

R. W. Stop a bit, my dear. I wish to lead up to it by degrees. And that Mr. Boffin has not treated him well?

Bella. Has treated him most shamefully, dear pa!

R. W. Of which a certain mercenary young person distantly related to myself could not approve? Am I leading up to it right?

Bella. Could not approve, sweet pa.

R. W. Upon which the certain mercenary young person distantly related to myself, having previously observed and mentioned to myself that prosperity was spoiling Mr. Boffin, felt that she must not sell her sense of what was right and what was wrong, and what was true and what was false, and what was just and what was unjust, for any price that could be paid to her by any one alive? Am I leading up to it right?

Bella. Yes, pa.

R. W. And therefore — and therefore this mercenary young person distantly related to myself refused the price, took off the splendid fashions that were part of it, put on the comparatively poor dress that I had last given her, and trusting to my supporting her in what was right, came straight to me. Have I led up to it?

Bella (*stealing her arm round his neck.*) Yes, pa dear.

R. W. The mercenary young person distantly related to myself did well! The mercenary young person distantly related to myself did not trust me in vain! I admire this mercenary young person distantly related to myself more in this dress than if she had come to me in China silks, Cashmere shawls, and Golconda diamonds. I

love this young person dearly. I say to the man of this young person's heart, out of my heart and with all of it, "My blessing on this engagement betwixt you, and she brings you a good fortune when she brings you the poverty she has accepted for your sake and the honest truth's!" (*Kisses BELLA, and shakes ROKE. by the hand.*)

Bella. Thank you, pa dear, for being so good to your little wilful Bella.

Roke. I thank you, sir, for my Bella and myself.

R. W. (lightly.) Well, well, now let's be merry. Here is another loaf and plenty more milk, and if it isn't a very sumptuous repast, we can be just as happy as the three bears in their house in the forest. (*Laughing.*) I'll be the great big large bear.

Roke (gaily.) And I the middle-sized bear.

Bella (taking a hand of each.) And I the little, small, wee bear. Only, pa dear, and John, you must not eat up the poor little wee bear, because she's a very weak and silly little bear, and you are such great, wise, strong bears.

Roke. My darling!

R. W. My own little Bella!

Bella. And now, pa dear, and John, I'll set the stylish table with the elegant repast, and we'll all be happy and comfortable. (*They prepare to eat.*)

Act Drop.

ACT IV.

SCENE. — *Same as Act I.*

MRS. WILFER, sitting L. LAVVY setting table R. C. GEORGE S., with cane in mouth, extreme R., gazing at LAVVY. R. W. changing coat and boots for dressing-gown and slippers, L. C., as curtain rises.

Mrs. W. You do not, R. W., inquire for your daughter Bella.

R. W. To be sure, my dear, I did omit it. How — or perhaps I should rather say where — is Bella?

Mrs. W. (*folding her arms.*) Not here.

R. W. Oh, indeed, my dear!

Mrs. W. Not here. In a word, R. W., you have no daughter Bella.

R. W. No daughter Bella, my dear?

Mrs. W. No. Your daughter Bella has bestowed herself upon a Mendicant.

R. W. Good gracious, my dear!

Mrs. W. Show your father his daughter Bella's letter, Lavinia. I think your father will admit it to be documentary proof of what I tell him. I believe your father is acquainted with his daughter Bella's writing. But I do not know. He may tell you he is not. Nothing will surprise me.

Lavvy, (*handing letter to R. W.*) Posted at Greenwich and dated this morning. Hopes Ma won't be angry, but is happily married to Mr. John Rokesmith, and didn't mention it beforehand to avoid words, and please tell darling you, and love to me, and I should like to know what you'd have said if any other unmarried member of the family had done it! (*Sits close by GEORGE's side with a condescending air.*)

R. W. (*reading the letter.*) Dear me!

Mrs. W. You may well say "Dear me!"

R. W. Dear me!

Mrs. W. You said that before.

R. W. (*sitting.*) It's very surprising. But I suppose, my dear, that we must make the best of it? Would you object to my pointing out, my dear, that Mr. John Rokesmith is not (so far as I am acquainted with him), strictly speaking, a Mendicant.

Mrs. W. Indeed? Truly so? I was not aware that Mr. John Rokesmith was a gentleman of landed property. But I am much relieved to hear it.

R. W. (*meekly.*) I doubt if you have heard it, my dear.

Mrs. W. Thank you. I make false statements, it appears. So be it. If my daughter flies in my face, surely my husband may.

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND:



The one thing is not more unnatural than the other. There seems a fitness in the arrangement. By all means!

Lavvy. Ma, I must say I think it would be much better if you would keep to the point, and not hold forth about people's flying into people's faces, which is nothing more nor less than impossible nonsense.

Mrs. W. How!

Lavvy. Just im-possible nonsense, ma; and George Sampson knows it is, as well as I do. The true point is, that Bella has behaved in a most unsisterly way to me, and might have severely compromised me with George and with George's family, by making-off and getting married in this very low and disreputable manner — with some pew-opener or other, I suppose, for a bridesmaid — when she ought to have confided in me, and ought to have said, "If, Lavvy, you consider it due to your engagement with George, that you should countenance the occasion by being present, then, Lavvy, I beg you to be present, keeping my secret from ma and pa." As of course I should have done.

Mrs. W. As of course you would have done? Ingrate! Viper!

George S. (rising and feebly advancing.) I say! You know, ma'am. Upon my honor you mustn't. With the highest respect for you, ma'am, upon my life you mustn't. No really, you know. When a man with the feelings of a gentleman finds himself engaged to a young lady, and it comes (even on the part of a member of the family) to vipers, you know! — I would merely put it to your own good feeling, you know. (*Mrs. W. rises and glares at GEORGE S.*)

Lavvy, (rising and stepping tragically between them.) My own unnatural mother wants to annihilate George! But you shan't be annihilated, George. I'll die first! (*Flings her arms round his neck and clings to him with a melodramatic air.*)

George S. (shaking his head at MRS. W.) With every sentiment of respect for you, you know, ma'am — vipers really doesn't do you credit.

Lavvy, (wildly.) You shall not be annihilated, George! Ma shall destroy me first, and then she'll be contented. Oh, oh, oh! Have I lured George from his happy home to expose him to this? George dear, be free! Leave me, ever dearest George, to ma and to my fate. Give my love to your aunt, George, and implore her not to curse the viper that has crossed your path and blighted your existence. Oh, oh, oh! (*Falls into mock hysterics in his arms; he deposits her in chair C., where she remains moaning and sobbing extravagantly.*)

George S. (bending over LAVVY.) Demon — with the highest respect for you, ma'am — behold your work!

Lavvy, (faintly.) George dear, are you safe? George love, what has happened? Where is ma? (*GEORGE assists her to Mrs. W., who kisses her forehead; he then returns her to chair C.*) George dear, I am afraid I have been foolish; but I am still a little

weak and giddy; don't let go my hand, George. George dear, after what has passed, I am sure ma will tell pa that he may tell Bella we shall all be glad to see her and her husband.

George S. I am sure of it. I eminently respect Mrs. Wilfer, and ever must, and ever shall. Never more eminently than after what has passed.

Mrs. W. (in a very deep voice.) Far be it from me to run counter to the feelings of a child of mine, and of a Youth who is the object of her maiden preference. I may feel — nay, know — that I have been deluded and deceived. I may feel — nay, know — that I have been set aside and passed over. I may feel — nay, know — that after having so far overcome my repugnance toward Mr. and Mrs. Boffin as to receive them under this roof, and to consent to your daughter Bella's residing under theirs, it were well if your daughter Bella had profited in a worldly point of view by a connection so distasteful, so disreputable. I may feel — nay, know — that in uniting herself to Mr. Rokesmith she has united herself to one who is, in spite of shallow sophistry, a Mendicant. And I may feel well assured that your daughter Bella does not exalt her family by becoming a Mendicant's bride. But I suppress what I feel, and say nothing of it.

George S. This is the sort of thing, ma'am, that a man must expect, you know, from one who has ever been an example in her family, and never an outrage. Never more so, ma'am, than after what has passed. I shall never forget, ma'am, the touching feelings that your conduct has awakened within me. And Lavinia's also, whom I respect with a feeling little less than — divine. Yes, ma'am, I hope there isn't a man with a beating heart, ma'am, that isn't capable of — yes — of — yes certainly, to be sure.

(Restores cane to his mouth, and sits confused.)

Mrs. W. Therefore, R. W., let your daughter Bella come where she will, and she will be received. So — so will her husband.

Lavvy. And I beg, pa, that you will not tell Bella what I have undergone. It can do no good, and it might cause her to reproach herself.

George S. My dearest girl, she ought to know it.

Lavvy. No, dearest George, let it be buried in oblivion.

George S. Too noble!

Lavvy. Nothing is too noble, dearest George. And I hope, pa, that you will avoid mentioning George's rising prospects when Bella is present. It might seem like taunting her with her own poor fortunes. Let me ever remember that I am her younger sister, and ever spare her painful contrasts, which could not but wound her deeply.

George S. Ah, such is the demeanor of Angels!

Lavvy. No, dearest George, I am but too well aware that I am merely human.

Mrs. W. (suddenly turning to R. W.) Can you think of your daughter Bella, and SLEEP?

R. W. (waking.) Yes — I think I can, my dear.

Mrs. W. Then I would recommend you, if you have a human feeling, to retire to bed.

R. W. Thank you, my dear; but I think we will have a little supper first. (*Goes to table.*)

Lavvy. George! Ma's chair. (*GEORGE follows MRS. W. to table and places chair for her; she glaring at him. They sit at table, MRS. W. facing audience L. LAVVY same, R. GEORGE and R. W. beside them in front. Leave space behind table for BELLA and ROKE. R. W. cuts loaf and helps all.*)

Lavvy. Now, ma and pa, tell me if I wasn't right about those Boffins. George Sampson, speak! What did I tell you about those Boffins?

George S. (murmuring.) Yes, indeed.

Lavvy. Yes! I told George Sampson, as George Sampson tells you, that those hateful Boffins would pick a quarrel with Bella, as soon as her novelty had worn off. (*GEORGE passes his arm round her waist, but withdraws it with a sharp exclamation.*) You must be careful, George. As I was saying, those Boffins have behaved in a detestable manner, and as Bella's sister and an engaged young lady — (*GEORGE essays as before.*) Look out, George, you'll prick yourself again — I feel bound to express my opinion of them.

R. W. Will you have a little of the salad, my dear?

Mrs. W. I thank you, R. W.

Lavvy. I wish to goodness, ma, that you'd loll a little.

Mrs. W. How! Loll!

Lavvy. Yes, ma.

Mrs. W. I hope I am incapable of it.

Lavvy. I am sure you look so, ma. But why one should sit at one's own table as if one's under-petticoat was a backboard, I do not understand.

Mrs. W. Neither do I understand how a young lady can mention the garment in the name of which you have indulged. I blush for you.

Lavvy. Thank you, ma; but I can do it for myself, I am obliged to you, when there's any occasion.

George S. After all, you know, ma'am, we all know it's there.

Mrs. W. We know it's there!

Lavvy. Really, George, I must say that I don't understand your allusions, and that I think you might be more delicate and less personal.

George S. Go it! Oh yes! Go it, Miss Lavinia Wilfer!

Lavvy. What you may mean, George Sampson, by your omnibus-driving expressions, I cannot pretend to imagine. Neither do

I wish to imagine. It is enough for me to know in my own heart that I am not going to — go it.

George S. Oh yes! Thus it ever is. I never —

Lavvy. If you mean to say that you never brought up a young gazelle, you may save yourself the trouble, because nobody supposes that you ever did. We know you better.

Mrs. W. Mr. Sampson, I cannot permit you to misrepresent the intentions of a child of mine.

Lavvy. Let him alone, ma. It is indifferent to me what he says or does.

George S. Dearest Lavinia, I adore you!

Lavvy. Then, if you can't do it in a more agreeable manner, I wish you wouldn't.

George S. I also respect you, ma'am, to an extent which must ever be below your merits, I am well aware, but still up to an uncommon mark. I am painfully conscious of my own unworthiness. Is it not pardonable if I feel sensitive, ma'am, when I see a disposition on the part of my adorable Lavinia to take me up short?

Lavvy. George, notwithstanding all these surroundings, I am yours — as yet. How long that may last is another question, but I am yours *as yet*.

Enter BELLA and ROKESMITH, L.

Bella. Dearest ma, how do you do, dearest ma? And Lavvy darling, how do you do? And George, how do you do? And when are you going to be married, and how rich are you going to grow? You must tell me all about it presently. (*Throws off her hat and sits at table.*) Dearest pa, how do you do? good dear little pa! John dear, kiss Ma and Lavvy, and then we shall all be at home and comfortable. (*ROKE kisses MRS. W. and LAVVY, and then sits beside BELLA.*) Now let me pour out the tea. Dearest Ma and Lavvy, you both take sugar I know. I didn't before I was married, but I do now, because John does. Cut some more bread and butter, John, there's a love! Ma likes hers doubled. And, John dear, did you kiss Ma and Lavvy? Oh you did? Well, I only asked because I didn't see you.

Lavvy. What's the matter, ma, ain't you well?

Mrs. W. (*who has been glaring motionless at BELLA.*) Doubtless I am very well. What should be the matter with me?

Lavvy. You don't seem very brisk, ma.

Mrs. W. Brisk! brisk! Whence the low expression, Lavinia? If I am uncomplaining, if I am silently contented with my lot, let that suffice for my family.

George S. Yes, ma'am, to be sure.

Bella. And now you must tell me, dearest Ma and Lavvy, upon your words and honors! Didn't you for a moment — just a moment — think I was a dreadful little wretch when I wrote to say

I had run away? I think it must have made you rather cross. But you see I had been such a heedless, heartless creature, and had let you so to expect that I should marry for money, that I was sly about it, and so I said to John that if he liked to take me without any fuss, he might. And as he did like, I let him.

Mrs. W. On a day like this, the mind naturally reverts to papa and mamma. (I here allude to my parents.) I was considered tall; perhaps I was. Papa and mamma were unquestionably tall. I have rarely seen a finer woman than my mother; never than my father.

Lavvy. Whatever grandpapa was, he wasn't a female.

Mrs. W. Your grandpapa was what I describe him to have been, and would have struck any of his grandchildren to the earth who presumed to question it. It was one of mamma's cherished hopes that I should become united to a tall member of society. Mamma would appear to have had an indefinable foreboding of what afterwards happened, for she would frequently urge upon me, "Not a little man. Promise me, my child, not a little man. Never, never, never marry a little man." Among the most prominent members of that distinguished circle, was a gentleman measuring six feet four in height. *He was not an engraver.*

George S. No, ma'am, of course not.

Mrs. W. This gentleman was so obliging as to honor me with attentions which I could not fail to understand.

George S. When it comes to that you know, you can always tell, ma'am.

Mrs. W. I immediately announced to both my parents that those attentions were misplaced, and that I could not favor his suit. They inquired was he too tall? I replied it was not the stature, but the intellect was too lofty. I well remember mamma's clasping her hands, and exclaiming "This will end in a little man!" Within a month I first saw R. W., my husband. Within a year I married him. It is natural for the mind to recall these dark coincidences on the present day.

R. W. My dear, I am really afraid you are not enjoying yourself.

Mrs. W. On the contrary, R. W., quite so.

Bella. And now you will naturally want to know, dearest ma and Lavvy, how we live and what we have got to live upon. Well! And so we live on Blackheath, in the charm-ingest of dolls' houses, de-lightfully furnished; and we have a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and we have all we want, and more. And lastly, if you would like to know in confidence, as perhaps you may, what is my opinion of my husband, my opinion is — that I almost love him!

Roke. And if you would like to know in confidence, as perhaps you may, my opinion of my wife, my opinion is —

Bella. Stop, sir! No, John dear! Seriously! Please not yet a while! I want to be something so much worthier than the doll in the dolls' house.

Roke. My darling, are you not?

Bella. Not half, not a quarter, so much worthier as I hope you will some day find me! Try me through some reverses, John, and then tell me what you think of me.

Roke. I will, my Life. I promise it.

Bella. That's my dear John! And you won't speak a word now; will you?

Roke. And I won't speak a word now!

Bella. I'll go further, Pa, and Ma, and Lavvy. John don't suspect it — he has no idea of it — but I quite love him!

Roke. And now may I speak a word, my dear?

Bella. Yes, John dear, now I'll allow you.

Roke. (rising.) My love, now that we are all here together, and so happy and contented, I have a little surprise for you.

Bella. Another surprise, John?

Roke. Yes. (*Goes to door L. and admits MR. and MRS. BOFFIN.*) And I hope a pleasant one.

Bella (rising and meeting Mrs. B.) Dear, kind Mrs. Boffin.

Mrs. B. My dearest dear darling, sweet pretty pretty. (*Embraces BELLA.*) And here is Noddy too, my child; don't you see him?

Bella. Yes, but — I thought —

Mr. B. (shaking her by the hand.) Never mind what you thought, Bella my dear. Ha! ha! John understands all about it; so does the old lady.

Bella. John understands? But what does it all mean?

R. W. (bringing chairs forward, c.) Hadn't you better offer your visitors some chairs, my dear?

Bella. Yes, pa; but — I am so bewildered, I quite forgot.

Mrs. B. Come, deary, sit right here by me; and John you sit the other side; and then we shall be comfortable.

(*MRS. B. and BELLA sit in chairs C. ROKE. sits at BELLA's left. MR. B. sits R. C.*)

Mrs. W. (advancing down C.) Pardon me! But when persons comparatively unknown to this household enter here, after what has transpired in regard to my daughter Bella, it were surely fitting in one who claims to be a parent, though a humble one, to seek to know their design.

Mr. B. (rising and shaking Mrs. W.'s hand.) I hope you'll excuse us, ma'am, and I'm sure you will after you've heard the story. Lord bless us, the old lady'll fix it up in a minute.

Mrs. W. Pardon me! but it were —

Lavvy. Oh lor, ma, don't make such a fuss about nothing.

Mrs. W. How!

Lavvy. I say don't make such a fuss about just nothing at all; and pray don't stand staring at me in that intensely aggravating manner! If you see a black on my nose, tell me so; if you don't, leave me alone.

Mrs. W. Do you address Me in those words? Do you presume?

Lavvy. Don't talk about presuming, ma, for goodness sake! A girl who is old enough to be engaged, is quite old enough to object to be stared at as if she was a Clock.

Mrs. W. Audacious one! Your grandmamma, if so addressed by one of her daughters, at any age, would have insisted on her retiring to a dark apartment.

Lavvy. My grandmamma wouldn't have stood staring people out of countenance, I think.

Mrs. W. She would!

Lavvy. Then it's a pity she didn't know better. A pretty exhibition my grandmamma must have made of herself! I wonder whether she ever insisted on people's retiring into the ball of St. Paul's; and if she did, how she got them there!

Mrs. W. Silence! I command silence!

Lavvy. I have not the slightest intention of being silent, ma, but quite the contrary. I am not going to be eyed as if I was a natural curiosity, and sit silent under it. I am not going to have George Sampson eyed, and sit silent under it.

George S. No, certainly not, ma'am, you know.

Mrs. W. If Mr. George Sampson, as a friend of this family, chooses to join with other members in setting aside and passing over your wife, R. W., she has nothing to say. It is quite fitting and appropriate, R. W.

R. W. (bringing chair forward to R. C.) My dear, will you have a chair?

Mrs. W. Thank you, R. W., no! My place is not here.

(MRS. W. turns, walks to extreme R. and sits stiffly. LAVVY and GEORGE S. push back table and clear it during the following.)

R. W. (sitting R. C.) Just as you like, my dear.

(A pause, during which MRS. B. rocks herself back and forward, laughing, clapping her hands, and embracing BELLA by turns.)

Mr. B. (sitting R. C.) Old lady, old lady, if you don't begin, somebody else must.

Mrs. B. I'm agoing to begin, Noddy, my dear; only it isn't easy for a person to know where to begin, when a person is in this state of delight and happiness. Bella, my dear — tell me, who's this? *(pointing to ROKESMITH.)*

Bella. Who's this? My husband.

Mrs. B. Ah! But tell me his name, deary!

Bella. Rokesmith.

Mrs. B. No, it ain't! Not a bit of it.

Bella (bewildered.) At least his name is John, I suppose?

Mrs. B. Ah! I should think so, deary! I should hope so! Many and many is the time I have called him by his name of John. But what's his other name, his true other name? Give a guess, my pretty!

Bella (faintly.) I can't guess.

Mrs. B. I could, and what's more, I did! I found him out, all in a flash as I may say, one night. Didn't I, Noddy?

Mr. B. Ay! That the old lady did!

Mrs. B. Harkee to me, deary. It was after a particular night when John had been disappointed—as he thought—in his affections. It was after a night when John had made an offer to a certain young lady, and the certain young lady had refused it. It was the very next night. My Noddy wanted a paper out of his Secretary's room, and I says to Noddy, "I am going by the door, and I'll ask him for it." I tapped at his door, and he didn't hear me. I looked in, and saw him a-sitting lonely by his fire, brooding over it. He chanced to look up with a pleased kind of smile in my company when he saw me, and then in a single moment, Bella my precious, I knew him! Yes; too many a time had I seen him, when he was a little child, in need of being brightened up with a comforting word! Too many and too many a time to be mistaken, when that glimpse of him come at last! No, no! I knew it was John! So what might you think by this time that your husband's name was, dear?

Bella. Not Harmon? That's not possible!

Mrs. B. Don't tremble. Why not possible, deary, when so many things are possible?

Bella. He was killed.

Mrs. B. Thought to be. But if ever John Harmon drew the breath of life on earth, that is certainly John Harmon's arm round your waist now, my pretty. If ever John Harmon had a wife on earth, that wife is certainly you.

Bella. John, O John! I—cannot understand it all.

Roke. My darling, what Mrs. Boffin says is true. I was supposed to be killed, and was even suspected of my own murder; but I am John Harmon, the very John Harmon who was left to you in old Mr. Harmon's will.

Bella. Oh, I see it all now! Dear, good, unselfish John! You gave up everything, name, fortune, and position, for my sake—that I might not be forced into marrying you, you dear, splendid old John!

Roke. Yes, you have guessed the secret, dear.

Mrs. W. It seems, R. W., that your daughter Bella's husband is not what he has hitherto represented himself to be. You will perhaps remember my dark forebodings at the hour when he entered our abode.

R. W. But, my dear, think how much better it is for Bella and all of us.

Lavvy. Yes, ma, think of being deprived of the privilege of being a Mendicant's mamma!

Mrs. W. Peace, Lavinia! It is as you think, R. W., not as I do.

Mrs. B. But that isn't all yet, my beauty. Bless you, it wasn't John only that was in the secret. We was all of us in it.

Bella. But — I don't understand —

Mrs. B. Of course you don't, my deary. How can you till you're told! So now I am going to tell you. Once, twice, three times, and the horses is off. Here they go! When Noddy and me found out that this was our little John, and that we was living on his rightful property, you should have seen how frightened my Noddy was; and says he, "Old lady, we must give it all back to John and make him happy." But you see John wouldn't do that on account of a certain lovely woman. This naturally brings up a confabulation regarding the certain fair young person; when Noddy gives it as his opinion that she is a deary creetur. "She may be a leetle spoilt, and nat'rally spoilt," he says, "by circumstances, but that's only on the surface; and I lay my life," he says, "that she's the true golden gold at heart."

Mr. B. That's it, that's it! And you said so too, old lady.

Mrs. B. Don't you mind him, my dear; stick to me. Then says John, O, if he could but prove so! Then we both of us ups and says that minute, "Prove so!" "What will content you?" says we. "If she was to stand up for you when you was slighted, if she was to show herself of a generous mind when you was oppressed, if she was to be truest to you when you was poorest and friendliest, and all this against her own seeming interest, how would that do?" "Do!" says John; "it would raise me to the skies."

Mr. B. "Then," says I, "make your preparations for the ascent, John, it being my firm belief that up you go."

Mrs. B. And then he began, Bella my precious; and Lord bless us, how he *did* begin!

Mr. B. I was a regular grisly old growler, wasn't I, Bella my dear? Ha, ha! "Mew," says the cat, "Bow wow," says the dog, "Quack quack," says the duck. Ha! ha! ha! (*Walks about, laughing.*)

Bella (rising.) Oh, now I see it all. You dear, dear Mr. Boffin! You didn't mean it, after all. (*Goes to him and shakes his hand in both of hers.*) And, Mrs. Boffin, how kind and good you were to me when I was such a little wretch. (*Embraces her; she rises.*) And John too, all of you doing everything to bring good-for-nothing little me to my senses. (*Going to R. W., who rises.*) Pa dear, why is it that you all have been so kind and considerate with me? Dear, good little Pa! And Ma dear, now you see how good and kind my Mr. and Mrs. Boffin have been to me.

Mrs. W. (rising.) The claims of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin upon my child are doubtless of paramount importance. It is quite fitting, R. W., that such should be the case.

Bella. But is the story done? Is there no more of it?

Mrs. B. What more of it should there be, deary?

Bella. Are you sure you have left nothing out of it?

Mrs. B. I don't think I have.

Bella. Then, sir, please, I've something to say to you. (*To Mr.*

B., *who stands c.*) Please I beg your pardon, and I made a small mistake of a word when I took leave of you last. Please I have found out something not yet mentioned. Please I don't believe you are a hard-hearted miser at all, and please I don't believe you ever for one single minute were!

Mrs. B. That's it, my deary; he pretended it all, and O my, how he did it!

Mr. B. I assure you, my dear, that on that celebrated day I made what has since been agreed upon to be my grandest demonstration — I allude to Mew says the cat, Quack quack says the duck, and Bow-wow-wow says the dog. Never thought of it afore the moment, my dear! When John said, if he had been so happy as to win your affections and possess your heart, it come into my head to turn round upon him with "Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew says the cat, Quack quack says the duck, and Bow-wow-wow says the dog." I couldn't tell you how it come into my head or where from, but it had so much the sound of a rasper that I own to you it astonished myself. I was awful nigh bursting out a-laughing though, when it made John stare! Ha, ha, ha!

Mrs. B. Well now, my dear, here we all are, and your mother and father's agreed, and Noddy and me's so happy in telling you, and the horses is in, and the story is done, and God bless you, my Beauty, and God bless us all.

MRS. BOFFIN. BELLA.

MR. BOFFIN.

ROKESMITH.

R. WILFER.

LAVVY.

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PHILIP, <i>his eldest son, married to</i>	HOST.	
<i>Susan Forrest.</i>	SAILOR.	
WILLIAM }	HANGMAN.	
JOHN }	MRS. ANN HARDING, <i>second</i>	
MASTER RAINSFORTH, <i>a quarrel-</i>	<i>wife to Old Harding.</i>	
<i>some gentleman.</i>	SUSAN, <i>daughter of Old Forrest,</i>	
GOODWIN }	<i>wife to Philip Harding.</i>	
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A MERCHANT, <i>brother to Mrs.</i>		
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Three male, three female characters. Costumes, modern; scene, a simple interior. Plays twenty minutes. A young husband brings home a friend to dinner to find that the cook has left and his wife has cooked the dinner. A series of disasters brings about a state of war and upon the battle-field arrive the wife's uncle and aunt as reinforcements. A flank movement by Auntie's pet dog turns the day, and all ends well. A trifle that can be recommended.

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Ten males, five females. Costumes, modern; scenery, two interiors. Plays two hours and a quarter. The college course of Bob, the mainstay of the football team, is threatened by his father's ruin, due to the scheming of the uncle and patron of Humphrey, a classmate. Humphrey places his own standing in jeopardy to save his chum and finally saves the situation. This is the backbone of a strong play with very strong and various incidental interests and lots of first class comedy. Good atmosphere, lots of humor, strong characters; can be highly recommended.

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BOB RICHARDS, captain of the football team, host at Forest Lodge.

H. GARDNER HUMPHREY, football manager.

FRANK BELL, electrician for "*Paint and Powder*."

BILL BLACK,

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TOM WHITE,

SAM GREEN,

MESSENGER BOY.

DOROTHY SPRAGUE,

EDITH RICHARDS, Bob's sister,

RUTH SARGENT,

MRS. HODGKINS, Bob's aunt, the chaperon.

AMY SINCLAIR GRANDBY, a Radcliffe student, Edith's friend.

} stage hands for "*Paint and Powder*."

} Students at Jackson College.

SYNOPSIS

ACT I.—Dining-room at Forest Lodge, morning.

ACT II.—Same as Act I. Evening of the following day.

ACT III.—Stage of the college gymnasium, on the afternoon preceding the performance of the *Paint and Powder* play.

THE CRIBBER

A College Comedy in Three Acts

By W. P. McIntosh

Six males, five females. Costumes, modern; scenery, three easy interiors. Plays an hour and a half. A student finds an examination paper that a professor has mislaid and hides it for temporary safety in another student's desk, where it is found in a search for a lady's letter by a jealous rival. The case looks black against a very popular man for a while, but is finally cleared up. Co-educational piece, with good atmosphere and lots of incidental fun.

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OUR MUTUAL FRIEND



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SHAMROCK AND ROSE,

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SYNOPSIS.

ACT. I. Scene, Squire Fitzgerald's Home, in Wicklow. Rose's story of Desmond's arrival. Shaun Cary hears a bit of valuable news. Barney O'Brady meets an unexpected visitor and shows him the door. Ileen and Barney. The Fugitive. The arrival of the soldiers. Capt. Beck quarrels with the Squire. The defence. The murder. THE ARREST.

ACT. II. Scene I: A Landscape. Cary and the Captain plot the abduction of Rose. Douglass' dilemma 'twixt love and duty. Scene II: The Prison. Barney's cell. Hot Irish in a stone jug. A friend in need. The red coat. Scene III: Rose receives a false message. Scene IV: Desmond's cell. The Death Warrant. Celt and Saxon. Barney a guard. The death knell. THE ESCAPE.

ACT. III. Scene I: O'Byrnes' Wood. The pretty girl milking her cow. Barney proposes to Ileen. Desmond hears bad news. Barney, in the guise of a soldier, gets important information from Cary. Scene II: Exterior of Beck's Castle by moonlight. Rose a Captive. Barney brings good news. The proposal and refusal. The ass kicks. The false captive. THE RESCUE.

ACT. IV. Scene: Corrigmór at Sunrise. Shaun Cary a captive. The arrival of Nano and Ileen. Tracked by Beck. Nano keeps Beck at Bay. The duel. Cary's shot. Beck's death. The "SHAMROCK AND ROSE."

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OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

CHARACTERS.

JOHN ROKESMITH, ("Our Mutual Friend.")
R. WILFER, ("Cherubic Pa.")
MR. BOFFIN, ("The Golden Dustman.")
GEORGE SAMPSON, ("The Friend of the Family.")
BELLA WILFER, ("The Lovely Woman.")
MRS. WILFER, ("Majestic Ma.")
LAVINIA WILFER, ("The Irrepressible Lavvy.")
MRS. BOFFIN, ("A dear, a dear, the best of dears.")

SCENE : London.

COSTUMES.

- John Rokesmith** — ("A dark gentleman, thirty at the most.") Plain black suit. Act IV., Dark suit. Light overcoat and gloves. Silk hat.
- R. Wilfer** — ("Rusty, Ruddy, Round.") Black suit and hat, worn and rusty. Act IV., Dressing-gown and slippers. *Must be short, stout, and blonde.*
- Mr. Boffin** — ("A broad, round-shouldered old fellow.") Thick shoes. Thick leather gaiters. Pea overcoat over suit of mourning. Broad-brimmed felt hat. Acts II. and III., Checked or striped suit. High-colored vest. Flashy neck-cloth. Watch and seals. Act IV., Add overcoat and hat.
- George Sampson** — ("A young gentleman of rising prospects.") Blonde hair, parted in the middle. White trousers and vest. Velvet coat. Yellow gloves. Bright neck-tie. Silk hat. Large cane, the round head of which he holds in his mouth all the time.
- Bella** — ("So mercenary, so wilful, but so pretty.") Act I., Plain black dress. Act II., Elegant riding habit. Act III., Rich house-dress, changed in Scene 2 to very plain dress, sacque, and hat. Act IV., Stylish walking costume, (not too rich.)
- Mrs. Wilfer** — ("A tall woman, and an angular.") Severely plain brown or gray waist and skirt — short enough to show slippers and black stockings. Plain collar. Handkerchief tied over head and knotted under chin. Large-sized cotton gloves (worn all the time.)
- Lavvy** — ("Old enough to be engaged.") Short costumes of girl of sixteen. Act IV., Long trailing house-dress, of bright color and over-trimmed.
- Mrs. Boffin** — ("A smiling creature, broad of figure and simple of nature.") Elegant velvet or silk costumes. A profusion of jewelry. Broad velvet hat with long plumes. Acts I. and IV., Long velvet mantle.

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND.

ACT I.

SCENE. — *A plainly furnished room in R. WILFER's house. MRS. WILFER sitting majestically in the corner, L. BELLA and LAVVY playing backgammon, R. C. Doors R. and L. Window C.*

Enter R. WILFER, R.

R. W. Well, Piggywiggies, good morning ! and a fine morning it is too !

Mrs. W. If, *R. W.*, you had arisen from your repose at the hour generally adopted by your *family* as seasonable for leaving their couches, you might have accosted your family in more appropriate language.

R. W. Why, what's the matter, my dear ? I'm sure —

Mrs. W. (*interrupting him with a wave of her gloved hand.*) If you will gaze upon the entrance to your domicile, *R. W.*, as you issue forth to your daily toil, doubtless you will understand my meaning.

R. W. Why, what has happened, my dear ?

Lavvy. O lor ! they've been and took off ma's door-plate, pa, that's all.

Mrs. W. Yes, the man came himself with a pair of pincers, and took it off, and took it away. He said that as he had no expectation of ever being paid for it, and as he had an order for another Ladies' School door-plate, it was better (burnished up) for the interests of all parties.

R. W. Perhaps it was, my dear ; what do you think ?

Mrs. W. You are master here, *R. W.* It is as you think ; not as I do. Perhaps it might have been better if the man had taken the door too ?

R. W. My dear, we couldn't have done without the door.

Mrs. W. Couldn't we ?

R. W. Why, my dear ! Could we ?

Mrs. W. It is as you think, *R. W.* ; not as I do.

R. W. (sitting.) What I was thinking of, my dear, was, that as we have let our first floor so well, and as we have now no place in which you could teach pupils, even if pupils —

Mrs. W. (interrupting.) The milkman said he knew of two young ladies of the highest respectability who were in search of a suitable establishment, and he took a card. Tell your father whether it was last Monday, Bella.

Bella. But we never heard any more of it, ma.

R. W. In addition to which, my dear, if you have no place to put two young persons into—

Mrs. W. (waving her gloved hand.) Pardon me, they were not young persons. Two young ladies of the highest respectability. Tell your father, Bella, whether the milkman said so.

R. W. My dear, it is the same thing.

Mrs. W. No, it is not. Pardon me!

R. W. I mean, my dear, it is the same thing as to space. As to space. I carry it no further than that. And solely looking at it—as I am sure you will agree, my love—from a fellow-creature point of view, my dear.

Mrs. W. I have nothing more to say. It is as you think, *R. W.*; not as I do. (*Bella jerks the backgammon board off the table and crosses to hearth-rug, C. LAVVY goes down on her hands and knees, and picks up the men.*) Poor Bella!

R. W. And poor Lavinia, perhaps, my dear?

Mrs. W. Pardon me, no! No, *R. W.* Lavinia has not known the trial that Bella has known. The trial that your daughter Bella has undergone, is, perhaps, without a parallel, and has been borne, I will say, nobly. When you see your daughter Bella in her black dress, which she alone of all the family wears, and when you remember the circumstances which have led to her wearing it, and when you know how those circumstances have been sustained, then, *R. W.*, lay your head upon your pillow, and say, "poor Lavinia!"

Lavvy (from under the table.) I don't want to be "poored" by pa, nor anybody else!

Mrs. W. I'm sure you do not, my dear, for you have a fine, brave spirit. And your sister Bella has a fine brave spirit of another kind—a spirit of pure devotion, a beau-ti-ful spirit.

Bella. I am sure, though you have no feeling for me, pa, I am one of the most unfortunate girls that ever lived. You know how poor we are, and what a glimpse of wealth I had, and how it melted away, and how I am here in this ridiculous mourning—which I hate!—a kind of a widow who never was married. And yet you don't feel for me.—Yes you do, yes you do. (*Goes to him and passes her hand through and through his hair.*)

R. W. My dear, I do.

Bella. Yes, and I say you ought to. If they had only left me alone and told me nothing about it, it would have mattered much less. But that nasty Mr. Lightfoot feels it his duty, as he says, to

write and tell me what is in reserve for me, and then I am obliged to get rid of George Sampson.

Lavvy (rising.) You never cared for George Sampson, Bella.

Bella. And did I say I did, miss? George Sampson was very fond of me, and admired me very much, and put up with everything I did to him.

Lavvy. You were rude enough to him.

Bella. And did I say I wasn't, miss? I am not setting up to be sentimental about George Sampson. I only say George Sampson was better than nothing.

Lavvy. You didn't show him that you thought even that.

Bella. You are a chit and a little idiot, or you wouldn't make such a dolly speech. What did you expect me to do? Wait till you are a woman, and don't talk about what you don't understand. You only show your ignorance! It's a shame! There never was such a hard case! I shouldn't care so much if it wasn't so ridiculous. It was ridiculous enough to have a stranger coming over to marry me, whether he liked it or not. It was ridiculous enough to know I shouldn't like him — how *could* I like him, left to him in a will like a dozen of spoons, with everything cut and dried beforehand. Those ridiculous points would have been smoothed away by the money, for I love money, and want money — want it dreadfully. I hate to be poor, and we are degradingly poor, offensively poor, miserably poor, beastly poor. And if the truth was known, when the Harmon murder was all over the town, and people were speculating on its being suicide, I dare say those impudent wretches at the clubs and places made jokes about the miserable creature's having preferred a watery grave to me. And the idea of being as poor as ever after all, and going into black, besides, for a man I never saw, and should have hated — as far as *he* was concerned — if I had seen! And now he is dead, and all the Harmon property is gone to those Boffins, and of course they will never take any notice of me, and I'm as poor as ever. It's a shame!

Mrs. W. Doubtless old Mr. Harmon was pleased with your personal attractions, — as who is not pleased with a child of mine? — and judged you a fit companion for his son, — as who would not?

Bella. Yes, without consulting *his* taste at all.

Mrs. W. When I married your father my taste was not consulted.

Lavvy. Nor his either, was it, ma?

Mrs. W. Certainly not. It was not the custom with mamma and papa (I allude to my parents) to consult the wishes of their offspring on such matters.

Lavvy. Such matters! What matters?

Bella. They don't concern you, Lavvy, at least. As for me, pa, I am resolved to get money, and to get money I must marry money! Talk to me of love! Talk to me of fiery dragons! But talk to me

of money, and horses and carriages, fine dresses and jewelry, and then indeed we touch upon realities. *(A knock L.)*

Mrs. W. Who is it? Enter!

Enter JOHN ROKESMITH, L.

Roke. The servant-girl had her key in the door as I came up, and directed me to this room, telling me I was expected. I am afraid I should have asked her to announce me.

Mrs. W. (rising.) Pardon me; not at all. Two of my daughters. R. W., this is the gentleman who has taken our first-floor. He was so good as to make an appointment for this morning, when you would be at home.

Roke. Seeing that I am quite satisfied, Mr. Wilfer, with the rooms, and with their situation, and with their price, I suppose a memorandum between us of two or three lines, and a payment down, will bind the bargain? I wish to send in furniture without delay. *(Takes a chair which R. W. offers him.)*

Mrs. W. The gentleman, R. W., proposes to take our apartments by the quarter. A quarter's notice on either side.

R. W. Shall I mention, sir, the form of a reference?

Roke. I think that a reference is not necessary; neither, to say the truth, is it convenient, for I am a stranger in London. I require no reference from you, and perhaps, therefore, you will require none from me. That will be fair on both sides. Indeed, I show the greater confidence of the two, for I will pay in advance whatever you please, and I am going to trust my furniture here. Whereas, if you were in embarrassed circumstances — this is merely supposititious —

Mrs. W. (sitting.) Perfectly.

Roke. Why then, I might lose it.

R. W. Well, money and goods are certainly the best of references.

Bella. Do you think they are the best, pa?

R. W. Among the best, my dear.

Bella. I should have thought, myself, it was so easy to add, "the usual kind of one."

(LAVVY gets pen and ink, and R. W. and Roke sign the agreement.)

Bella (taking the pen.) Where am I to go, pa, here in this corner? *(Signs. As she looks up Roke looks at her and she at him.)*

Roke. Much obliged to you, Miss Wilfer.

Bella. Obligated?

Roke. I have given you so much trouble.

Bella. Signing my name? Yes, certainly. But I am your andlord's daughter, sir. *(Roke pays money to R. W., and exits R.)*

Bella. Pa, we have got a murderer for a tenant.

Lavvy. Pa, we have got a robber.

Bella. To see him unable for his life to look anybody in the face! There never was such an exhibition.

R. W. My dears, he is a diffident gentleman, and I should say particularly so in the society of girls of your age.

Bella. Nonsense, our age! What's that got to do with him?

Lavvy. Besides, we are not of the same age: — which age?

Bella. Never you mind, Lavvy: you wait till you are of an age to ask such questions. Pa, mark my words! Between Mr. Rokesmith and me there is a natural antipathy and a deep distrust; and something will come of it! *(Goes to mirror.)*

R. W. My dear, and girls, between Mr. Rokesmith and me, there is a matter of eight sovereigns, and something for our supper shall come of it — something you all like. So now good morning, dears, and be sure to have a good fire kindled and the kettle boiling merrily, and *this* shall supply the rest. *(Exit L.)*

Lavvy. And by this time to-morrow we shall have Mr. Rokesmith here, and shall be expecting to have our throats cut.

Bella. You needn't stand between me and the light for all that. This is another of the consequences of being poor! The idea of a girl with a really fine head of hair having to do it by a few inches of looking-glass!

Lavvy. You caught George Sampson with it, Bella, bad as your means of dressing it are.

Bella. You low little thing! Caught George Sampson with it! Don't talk about catching people, miss, till your own time for catching — as you call it — comes.

Lavvy. Perhaps it has come.

Bella. What did you say? What did you say, miss? Nothing to wear! Nothing to go out in! Nothing to dress by! Being obliged to take in suspicious lodgers! *(A knock L.)*

Mrs. W. Peace! Lavinia, attend!

(Bella sits R.)

Lavvy (going to the door.) Please to walk in! Our servant is out.

Enter MR. and MRS. BOFFIN, L.

Mr. Boffin. Mornin', mornin'!

Lavvy. Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, I *think*?

Mrs. B. Yes, dear, that's our name.

Lavvy. If you'll step this way. — Ma, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin.

(Exit Lavvy, R.)

Mrs. W. (rising.) Pardon me; to what am I indebted for this honor?

Mr. B. To make short of it, ma'am, perhaps you may be acquainted with the names of me and Mrs. Boffin as having come into the Harmon property.

Mrs. W. I have heard, sir, of such being the case.

(Motions them to seats, which they take.)

Mr. B. And I dare say, ma'am, you are not very much inclined to take kindly to us?

Mrs. W. Pardon me. 'Twere unjust to visit upon Mr. and Mrs. Boffin a calamity which was doubtless a dispensation.

Mr. B. That's fairly meant, I am sure. Mrs. Boffin and me, ma'am, are plain people, and we don't want to pretend to anything, nor yet to go round and round at anything; because there's always a straight way to everything. Consequently, we make this call to say, that we shall be glad to have the honor and pleasure of your daughter's acquaintance, and that we shall be rejoiced if your daughter will come to consider our house in the light of her home equally with this. In short, we want to cheer your daughter, and to give her the opportunity of sharing such pleasures as we are agoing to take ourselves. We want to briak her up, and brisk her about, and give her a change.

Mrs. B. That's it! Lor! let's be comfortable.

Mrs. W. Pardon me. I have several daughters. Which of my daughters am I to understand is thus favored by the kind intentions of Mr. Boffin and his lady?

Mrs. B. Don't you see? Naturally, Miss Bella, you know.

Mrs. W. Oh-h! My daughter Bella is accessible, and shall speak for herself.

Bella. I am much obliged to you, I'm sure, but I doubt if I have the inclination to go out at all.

Mrs. W. Bella! you must conquer this.

Mrs. B. Yes, do what your ma says, and conquer it, my dear; because we shall be so glad to have you, and because you are much too pretty to keep yourself shut up. We are going to move into a nice house, and we're going to set up a nice carriage, and we'll go everywhere and see everything. *(Kisses Bella.)*

Mr. B. Yes, Mrs. Boffin has carried the day, ma'am, and we're going in neck and crop for Fashion.

Mrs. W. 'Twere far from me to deny the right of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin to such pretensions.

Mrs. B. (laughing.) Yes, what I want is Society. I say, a good house in a good neighborhood, good things about us, good living and good society. Lor-a-mussy! when I think of me in a light yellow chariot and pair, with silver boxes to the wheels—

Mr. B. Oh! you was thinking of that, was you, my dear?

Mrs. B. Yes! And with a footman up behind, with a bar across, to keep his legs from being poled! And with a coachman up in front, sinking down into a seat big enough for three of him, all covered with upholstery in green and white! And with two bay horses tossing their heads and stepping higher than they trot longways! And with you and me leaning back inside, as grand as ninepence! Ha ha ha! And so says I to Noddy, my dear, *[to Bella]* let's do something for that poor disappointed girl that's had her riches all took away; and so here we are, and we want you to come and live

with us, and see the sights and enjoy the money that ought to be your own, my love. You mustn't take a dislike to us, to begin with, because we couldn't help it, you know, my dear.

Mr. B. That's it! that's it! What a thinking steam-ingen in this old lady is! And she don't know how she does it. Neither does the ingen.

Enter LAVVY, followed by GEORGE SAMPSON, R.

Mrs. W. (rising.) My youngest daughter, Lavinia. Mr. George Sampson, a friend of the family.

Mrs. B. If you like to bring your sister with you when you come to stay with us, of course we shall be glad. The better you please yourself, Miss Bella, the better you'll please us.

Lavvy. Oh, my consent is of no consequence at all, I suppose?

Bella. Lavvy, have the goodness to be seen and not heard.

Lavvy. No, I won't! I'm not a child, to be taken notice of by strangers.

Bella. You *are* a child!

Lavvy. I'm not a child, and I won't be taken notice of. "Bring your sister," indeed!

Mrs. W. Lavinia! Hold! I will not allow you to utter in my presence the absurd suspicion that any strangers — I care not what their names — can patronize my child. Do you dare to suppose, you ridiculous girl, that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin would enter these doors upon a patronizing errand; or, if they did, would remain within them, only for one single instant, while your mother had the strength yet remaining in her vital frame to request them to depart? You little know your mother if you presume to think so.

Lavvy. It's all very fine —

Mrs. W. Hold! I will not allow this. Do you not know what is due to guests? Do you not comprehend that in presuming to hint that this lady and gentleman could have any idea of patronizing any member of your family — I care not which — you accuse them of an impertinence little less than insane?

Mr. B. Never mind me and Mrs. Boffin, ma'am; we don't care.

Mrs. W. Pardon me, but I do.

Lavvy. Yes, to be sure.

Mrs. W. And I require my audacious child to please to be just to her sister Bella; to remember that her sister Bella is much sought after; and that when her sister Bella accepts an attention, she considers herself to be conferring qui-i-te as much honor as she receives.

Bella. I can speak for myself, you know, ma. You needn't bring *me* in, please.

Lavvy. And it's all very well aiming at others through convenient me; but I should like to ask George Sampson what *he* says to it.

Mrs. W. (glaring at GEO. S.) Mr. Sampson, as a friend of this family and a frequenter of this house, is, I am persuaded, far too well-bred to interpose on such an invitation.

Mrs. B. We should be happy to see him at any time.

George S. Much obliged to you, but I'm always engaged, day and night.

Mr. B. By the way, ma'am, you have a lodger?

Mrs. W. A gentleman undoubtedly occupies our first floor.

Mr. B. I may call him Our Mutual Friend. What sort of a fellow is Our Mutual Friend, now? Do you like him?

Mrs. W. Pardon me! From the limited period of my acquaintance with Mr. Rokesmith, he seems to be a very eligible inmate.

Mr. B. Well, I'm not particularly acquainted with him, ma'am. You give a good account of him. Is he at home?

Mrs. W. Mr. Rokesmith has but a short period since left this apartment. Indeed, (*looking from window, c.*) there he stands at the garden gate. Waiting for you, perhaps.

Mr. B. (rising to go.) Perhaps so. Saw me come in, maybe.

Mrs. B. (going.) Good-bye for the present, Miss Bella. V shall meet again soon.

Mr. B. 'Mornin', 'mornin'! (*Exit MR. and MRS. BOFFIN, L.*)

Lavvy. There, Bella! At last I hope you have got your wish realized by your Boffins! You'll be rich enough now with you Boffins! You can have as much flirting as you like at your Boffins! But you won't take me to your Boffins, I can tell you! You and your Boffins too!

Geo. S. (taking cane from his mouth.) If Miss Bella's Mr. Boffin comes any more of his nonsense to me, I only wish him to understand, as betwixt man and man, that he does it at his per—

(*LAVVY jerks his cane in again forcibly.*)

Mrs. W. Of their manners I say nothing. Of their appearance I say nothing. Of the disinterestedness of their intentions towards Bella I say nothing. But the craft, the secrecy, the dark, deep, underhanded plotting written in Mrs. Boffin's countenance, make me shudder.

(*Exeunt MRS. W., LAVVY, and GEO. S., R.*)

Bella, (taking a book, and throwing herself into a chair, R.) If there is anything ma delights in, it is in making us all seem ridiculous before strangers. But I mean to go and live with that dear old Mrs. Boffin! I know I shall love her!

Enter ROKESMITH, L., and stands silently.

And then I shall escape all this poverty and misery, and having to take in suspicious lodgers—

Roke. (interrupting.) I beg your pardon, Miss Wilfer, but I—

Bella. Eh? Oh, it's you, is it?

Roke. Only I. A—fine—morning.

Bella. Is it? I was not thinking of the morning.

Roke. So intent upon your book?

Bella (confused.) Yes.

Roke. A love story, Miss Wilfer?

Bella. Oh dear, no, or I shouldn't be reading it. It's more about money than anything else.

Roke. And does it say that money is better than anything?

Bella (throwing down the book.) Upon my word, I forget what it says, but you can find out for yourself if you like. I don't want it any more.

Roke. I am charged with a message for you, Miss Wilfer.

Bella. Impossible, I think!

He. From Mrs. Boffin. She desired me to say to you (what I forgot), that she will be ready to receive you in another week, or furthest. You do not know, perhaps, Miss Wilfer, that I am Boffin's Secretary.

I'm as wise as ever, for I don't know what a Secretary is. It signifies.

Not at all.

Then are you going to be always there, Mr. Rokesmith?

Always? No. Very much there? Yes.

Dear me!

But my position there as Secretary, will be very different from yours as guest. You will know little, or nothing about me. I transact the business; you will transact the pleasure. I shall have no salary to earn; you will have nothing to do but to enjoy and attract.

Bella. Attract, sir? I don't understand you.

Roke. Excuse me. Since I have become entrusted with Mr. Boffin's affairs I have naturally come to understand the obligation he feels towards you, and the deep interest he takes in your welfare. I venture to remark, that much of your loss may be repaired. I speak, of course, merely of wealth, Miss Wilfer. The loss of a perfect stranger, whose worth, or worthlessness, I cannot estimate — nor you either — is beside the question. But this excellent gentleman and lady are so full of simplicity, so full of generosity, so inclined towards you, and so desirous to — how shall I express it? — to make amends for their good fortune, that you have only to respond. I take the liberty of saying these few words. You don't consider them intrusive, I hope?

Bella. Really, Mr. Rokesmith, I can't say what I consider them. They are perfectly new to me, and may be founded altogether on your own imagination.

Roke. You will see.

Re-enter MRS. W., R..

Roke. I have been telling Miss Wilfer that I have become, by a curious chance, Mr. Boffin's Secretary, or man of business.

Mrs. W. I have not the honor of any intimate acquaintance with Mr. Boffin, and it is not for me to congratulate that gentleman on the acquisition he has made.

Roke. A poor one enough.

Mrs. W. Pardon me; the merits of Mr. Boffin may be highly distinguished — may be more distinguished than the countenance of Mrs. Boffin would imply — but it were the insanity of humility to deem him worthy of a better assistant.

Roke. You are very good. I have also been telling Miss Wilfer that she is expected very shortly at the new residence in town.

Mrs. W. Having tacitly consented to my child's acceptance of the proffered attentions of Mrs. Boffin, I interpose no objection.

Bella. Don't talk nonsense, ma, please.

Mrs. W. Peace!

Bella. No, ma, I am not going to be made so absurd. Interposing objections!

Mrs. W. (very grandly.) I say that I am *not* going to interpose objections. If Mrs. Boffin (to whose countenance no disciple of Lavater could possibly for a single moment subscribe) seeks to illuminate her new residence with the attractions of a child of mine, I am content that she should be favored by the company of a child of mine.

Roke. You use the word, ma'am, I have myself used, when you speak of Miss Wilfer's attractions there.

Mrs. W. Pardon me, but I had not finished.

Roke. Pray excuse me.

Mrs. W. I was about to say, that when I use the term attractions, I do so with the qualification that I do not mean it in any way whatever.

Bella. Quite enough about this, I am sure, on all sides. Have the goodness, Mr. Rokesmith, to give my love to Mrs. Boffin —

Mrs. W. Pardon me! Compliments.

Bella. Love!

Mrs. W. No! Compliments.

Roke. Say Miss Wilfer's love, and Mrs. Wilfer's compliments.

Bella. And I shall be very glad to come when she is ready for me. The sooner the better.

Mrs. W. One last word, Bella, before descending to the family apartment. I trust that, as a child of mine, you will ever be sensible that it will be graceful in you, when associating with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin upon equal terms, to remember that the Secretary, Mr. Rokesmith, as your father's lodger, has a claim on your good word.

(*Exeunt BELLA and MRS. W., R.*)

Roke. (alone.) So insolent, so trivial, so capricious, so mercenary, so careless, so hard to touch, so hard to turn! And yet so pretty, so pretty! And if she knew!

(*Exit slowly L.*)

Act Drop.

ACT II.

SCENE. — *Drawing-room in Mr. Boffin's mansion; clock on mantel; long mirror, C.; plants and flowers in background. Doors R., L., and C.*

Enter BELLA in riding-habit, C.

Bella. I could endure that hateful ride no longer. I must see Mr. Rokesmith to-day, and I've sent for him to meet me here. Telling me of my duty to my family, indeed! Setting himself up as my adviser! I have a right to be rude to him! (*Takes off her hat and gloves, and sits in arm-chair by a small table, R.*)

Enter MR. BOFFIN, L.

Mr. B. Ah, Bella my dear, back again! That's right; "enjoy each day while yet you may," as says my literary man *with* a wooden leg.

Bella. He must be a queer man, sir.

Mr. B. He is, my dear; a regular slasher at poetry. Why, I'll tell you how he lapsed into it one day nearly every other line. Want to hear it, my dear?

Bella. Yes, do say it.

Mr. B. (repeating mechanically.)

"I'll tell thee how the maiden wept, Mrs. Boffin,

When her true love was slain, ma'am,

And how her broken spirit slept, Mrs. Boffin,

And never woke again, ma'am.

I'll tell thee (if agreeable to Mr. Boffin) how the steed drew nigh,

And left his lord afar:

And if my tale (which I hope Mr. Boffin might excuse) should make you sigh,

I'll strike the light guitar."

The poem was to me and Mrs. Boffin, and I consider that it brings us both in, in a beautiful manner. I got Rokesmith to make a copy of it, and the old lady thinks of having it framed. By the way, you've no idea what an amount of work that Secretary does, Bella, my dear. He takes such wonderful care of my affairs. And yet, somehow, I can't make him out.

Bella. May I ask why, sir?

Mr. B. Well, my dear, he won't meet any company here but you. When we have visitors, I should wish him to have his regular place at the table, like ourselves; but no, he won't take it.

Bella. If he considers himself above it, I should leave him alone.

Mr. B. It ain't that, my dear. He don't consider himself above it.

Bella. Perhaps he considers himself beneath it. If so, he ought to know best.

Mr. B. No; it ain't that neither. Rokesmith's a modest man, but he don't consider himself beneath it.

Bella. Then what does he consider, sir?

Mr. B. Dashed if I know! It seemed at first as if it was only the lawyer he objected to meet, but now it seems to be everybody except you.

Bella (rising and walking up c.) Indeed! *That's* it, then! Rather cool, I think, in a Secretary and pa's lodger, to make me the subject of his jealousy and keep eligible people off!

Mr. B. (aside.) Oho, that's it, is it? Well, my lady, we must bring you round.

Enter ROKESMITH, L.

(aloud.) Here's Rokesmith now. Good bye, my dear. Now's a good chance to tell him what you think of him. Put it to him strong, Bella, my dear. Ha, ha! *(Exit L.)*

Bella (turning.) Mr. Rokesmith, I wanted to say something to you when I could have the opportunity. You have no right to think ill of me, sir.

Roke. You don't know how well I think of you, Miss Wilfer.

Bella (sitting.) Truly, you must have a very high opinion of me, Mr. Rokesmith, when you believe that in prosperity I neglect and forget my old home.

Roke. Do I believe so?

Bella. You *did*, sir, at any rate.

Roke. I took the liberty of reminding you of a little omission into which you had fallen — insensibly and naturally fallen. It was no more than that.

Bella. And I beg leave to ask you, Mr. Rokesmith, why you took that liberty? — I hope there is no offence in the phrase? it is your own, remember.

Roke. Because I am truly, deeply, profoundly interested in you, Miss Wilfer. Because I wish to see you always at your best. Because I — shall I go on?

Bella. No, sir; you have said more than enough. I beg that you will *not* go on. If you have any generosity, any honor, you will say no more. I wish to speak to you, sir, once for all, and I don't know how to do it. I beg for a moment's time. *(After a pause.)* You know how I am situated here, sir, and you know how I am situated at home. I must speak to you for myself, since there is no one about me whom I could ask to do so. It is not generous in you, it is not honorable in you, to conduct yourself towards me as you do.

Roke. Is it ungenerous or dishonorable to be devoted to you; fascinated by you?

Bella. Preposterous!

Roke. I now feel obliged to go on, though it were only in self-explanation and self-defence. I hope, Miss Wilfer, that it is not unpardonable — even in me — to make an honest declaration of an honest devotion to you.

Bella. An honest declaration!

Roke. Is it otherwise?

Bella. I must request, sir, that I may not be questioned. You must excuse me if I decline to be cross-examined.

Roke. Oh, Miss Wilfer, this is hardly charitable. I ask you nothing but what your own emphasis suggests. However, I waive even that question. But what I have declared, I take my stand by. I cannot recall the avowal of my earnest and deep attachment to you, and I do not recall it.

Bella. I reject it, sir.

Roke. I should be blind and deaf if I were not prepared for the reply. Forgive my offence, for it carries its punishment with it.

Bella. What punishment?

Roke. Is my present endurance none? But excuse me; I did not mean to cross-examine you again.

Bella. You take advantage of a hasty word of mine to make me seem — I don't know what. I spoke without consideration when I used it. If that was bad, I am sorry; but you repeat it after consideration, and that seems to me to be at least no better. For the rest, I beg it may be understood, Mr. Rokesmith, that there is an end of this between us, now and for ever.

Roke. Now and for ever.

Bella. Yes. I appeal to you, sir, not to pursue me. I appeal to you not to take advantage of your position in this house to make my position in it distressing and disagreeable. I appeal to you to discontinue your habit of making your misplaced attentions as plain to Mrs. Boffin as to me.

Roke. Have I done so?

Bella. I should think you have. In any case, it is not your fault if you have not, Mr. Rokesmith.

Roke. I hope you are wrong in that impression. I should be very sorry to have justified it. I think I have not. For the future there is no apprehension. It is all over.

Bella. I am much relieved to hear it. I have far other views in life, and why should you waste your own?

Roke. Mine! My life! Pardon me, Miss Wilfer; you have used some hard words, for which I do not doubt you have a justification in your mind, that I do not understand. Ungenerous and dishonorable. In what?

Bella. I would rather not be asked.

Roke. I would rather not ask, but the question is imposed upon me. Kindly explain; or if not kindly, justly.

Bella. Oh, sir! is it generous and honorable to use the power here which your favor with Mr. and Mrs. Boffin and your ability in your place give you, against me?

Roke. Against you?

Bella. Is it generous and honorable to form a plan for gradually bringing their influence to bear upon a suit which I have shown you that I do not like, and which I tell you that I utterly reject? Would it be generous and honorable to step into your place—if you did so, for I don't know that you did, and I hope you did not—anticipating, or knowing beforehand, that I should come here, and designing to take me at this disadvantage?

Roke. This mean and cruel disadvantage!

Bella. Yes.

Roke. You are wholly mistaken, Miss Wilfer; wonderfully mistaken.

Bella (rising.) At least, sir, you know the history of my being here at all. And was it not enough that I should have been willed away like a horse, or a dog, or a bird; but must you too begin to dispose of me in your mind, and speculate in me, as soon as I had ceased to be the talk and the laugh of the town? Am I for ever to be made the property of strangers?

Roke. Believe me, you are wonderfully mistaken.

Bella. I should be glad to know it.

Roke. I doubt if you ever will. Good-night. Of course I shall be careful to conceal any traces of this interview from Mr. and Mrs. Boffin while I remain here. Trust me, what you have complained of is at an end for ever.

Bella. I am glad I have spoken then, Mr. Rokesmith. It has been painful and difficult, but it is done. If I have hurt you, I hope you will forgive me. I am inexperienced and impetuous, and I have been a little spoiled, but I really am not so bad as I dare say I appear, or as you may think me. (*Exit ROKESMITH, L.*) I didn't know the lovely woman could be such a dragon. (*Going to the mirror.*) You have positively been swelling your features, you little fool! I wish pa was here to talk about avaricious marriages, but he is better away, poor dear, for I know I should pull his hair if he *was* here. (*A pause.*) He has no right to any power over me, and how do I come to mind him, when I don't care for him? Pa's lodger and a Secretary! indeed! (*Sits L.*)

Enter R. MRS. WILFER, followed by LAVVY and GEO. S. arm-in-arm. They advance slowly towards BELLA.

Lavvy (pointing out objects in the room to GEORGE.) Exotica, George. An Ormolu clock, George. An Aviary beyond, George.

Bella (rising as she notes their approach.) Why, ma, is this

you? And here is Lavvy too! and George Sampson! How do you do, all? Ma, you shall have this very best chair, Mrs. Boffin's own favorite. (*Pushes arm-chair towards Mrs. W.*)

Mrs. W. Pardon me! It were not fitting for me to occupy Mrs. Boffin's magnificent reclining couch, coming as we do from the abode of conscious though independent poverty. (*Crosses to L. and sits on a high stool.*) This is quite an honor for us. You will probably find your sister Lavinia grown, Bella.

Lavvy (*who has been examining the room, suddenly comes forward.*) Ma, I really must request that you will not drag in such ridiculous nonsense as my having grown when I am past the growing age.

Mrs. W. I grew myself after I was married.

Lavvy. Very well, ma, then I think you had much better have left it alone.

George S. To be sure, certainly.

Lavvy. I suppose you won't consider yourself quite disgraced, Bella, if I give you a kiss? Well! (*Sitting R., with GEO. S. by her side.*) And how do you do, Bella? And how are your Boffins?

Mrs. W. Hold! I will not suffer this tone of levity.

Lavvy. My goodness me! How are your Spoffins, then? since ma so very much objects to your Boffins.

Mrs. W. Impertinent girl! Minx!

Lavvy. I don't care whether I'm a Minx, or a Sphinx; it's exactly the same thing to me, and I'd every bit as soon be one as the other; but I know this — I'll not grow after I am married!

Geo. S. No, certainly not.

Mrs. W. You will not? *You* will not?

Lavvy. No, ma, I will not. Nothing shall induce me.

Mrs. W. It was to be expected. A child of mine deserts me for the proud and prosperous, and another child of mine despises me. It is quite fitting.

Bella. Ma, Mr. and Mrs. Boffin are prosperous, no doubt; but you have no right to say they are proud. You must know very well that they are not.

Lavvy. In short, ma, you must know very well — or if you don't, more shame for you! — that Mr. and Mrs. Boffin are just absolute perfection.

Mrs. W. Truly, it would seem that we are required to think so. And this, Lavinia, is my reason for objecting to a tone of levity. Mrs. Boffin (of whose physiognomy I can never speak with the composure I would desire to preserve) and your mother are not on terms of intimacy.

Lavvy. After all, you know, Bella, you haven't told us how your Whats-his-names are.

Bella. I don't want to speak of them. They are much too kind and too good to be drawn into these discussions.

Mrs. W. Why put it so? Why adopt a circuitous form of speech? It is polite and it is obliging; but why do it? Why not

openly say that they are much too kind and too good for us? We understand the allusion. Why disguise the phrase?

Bella. Ma, you are enough to drive a saint mad; and so is Lavvy!

Mrs. W. Unfortunate Lavvy! She always comes in for it. My poor child!

Lavvy. Don't patronize *me*, ma, because I can take care of myself.

Mrs. W. (to Bella.) I only wonder that you find time and inclination to tear yourself from Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, and come to see us at all. I shall expect you but seldom.

Bella. Ma, I think you are too bad, and so is Lavvy. Pa is too magnanimous to feel envy and spite towards my generous friends, and pa is delicate enough and gentle enough to remember the sort of little claim they thought I had upon them. And I always did love poor dear pa better than all the rest of you put together, and I always do, and I always shall! (*Bursts into tears.*)

Mrs. W. (raising her eyes to heaven.) Fate has spared you this, R. W., whatever it may have thought proper to inflict upon me. (*Bursts into tears.*)

Lavvy, (walking around excitedly.) I hate the Boffins! I don't care who objects to their being called the Boffins. I WILL call 'em the Boffins. And I say they are mischief-making Boffins, and I say the Boffins have set Bella against me, and I tell the Boffins to their faces, that they are detestable Boffins, disreputable Boffins, odious Boffins, beastly Boffins. There! (*Flings herself into a chair and weeps.*)

George S. (rising.) What I mean to say is, Why do you take me to the glittering halls with which I can never compete, and then taunt me with my moderate salary! Is it generous? Is it kind? Bear with a wretch, Lavinia, bear with a wretch, ma'am, who feels the noble sacrifice you make for him (*slaps his forehead*), but is goaded almost to madness when he thinks of competing with the rich and influential. (*Falls on his knees at LAVVY'S feet and weeps.*)

Act Drop, (quick.)

ACT III.

SCENE I. — *Same as Act II.*

MR. and MRS. BOFFIN *discovered sitting together on a sofa, c.*

Mr. B. And so that is the secret, is it, old lady?

Mrs. B. Yes, Noddy; and to think that he is our own little John Harmon, our own little boy that we watched and tended; and he so sad and sorrowful, and we never to know.

Mr. B. But how did you find him out, tell me now?

Mrs. B. O, when I looked in last night and saw him sitting lonely by the fire, so sad, so lonely, after what our Bella had been saying to him, every grain of the gunpowder that had been lying sprinkled thick about him ever since I first set eyes on him when he came to be your Secretary, took fire, and I knew him. Too many times I'd seen him when he was a poor child, sitting, lonely, to be pitied heart and hand. I just made out to cry, "I know you now, you're John!" (*Laughs and cries at once.*)

Mr. B. Well, well, old lady, it's all right now. He's come to life again, and shall have his money back and be happy.

Mrs. B. But he won't take it, Noddy.

Mr. B. O, that's all a notion. It's all because — now I've got a secret to tell you, old lady. Rokesmith —

Mrs. B. (*interrupting.*) My little John Harmon.

Mr. B. Yes, our John Harmon, old lady, only he will call himself otherwise. Well, he's in love with our Bella, and now I've got a plan to make her fall in love with him. Don't you see?

Mrs. B. Bless her dear little heart, Noddy; I think she loves him now, only she don't know it herself.

Mr. B. But she has refused him. She wants to marry money. She has mighty grand ideas!

Mrs. B. Bless you, that's all a notion, Noddy, that's all a notion.

Mr. B. Well, I've got a notion too. You know how I've been treating him of late on purpose to make her take his part. Now, to-day we shall see. I'll go it stronger. I'll be a regular old grisly growler.

Mrs. B. Don't be too hard, Noddy my love.

Mr. B. (*rising and walking about.*) Yes I shall. I'll be a brown bear, a regular old grim one. Now, old lady, you mustn't spoil it all. Come, put on a sober face, for here comes Bella.

Enter BELLA, R.

Mr. B. Don't be alarmed, Bella, my dear. I'll see you righted.

Bella. See me righted, sir?

Mr. B. (drawing her hand through his arm.) Ay, ay! See you righted.

Enter ROKESMITH, L.

Mr. B. Shut the door, sir! I have got something to say to you which I fancy you'll not be pleased to hear.

Roke. I am sorry to reply, Mr. Boffin, that I think that very likely.

Mr. B. What do you mean?

Roke. I mean that it has become no novelty to me to hear from your lips what I would rather not hear.

Mr. B. Oh! perhaps we shall change that.

Roke. I hope so.

Mr. B. Now, sir, look at this young lady on my arm.

Roke. I do so.

Mr. B. How dare you, sir, tamper, unknown to me, with this young lady? How dare you pester this young lady with your impudent addresses?

Roke. I must decline to answer questions that are so offensively asked.

Mr. B. You decline to answer, do you? Then I'll tell you what it is, Rokesmith; I'll answer for you. There are two sides to this matter, and I'll take 'em separately. The first side is, sheer Insolence. That's the first side. It was sheer Insolence in you even to think of this young lady. This young lady was far above *you*. This young lady was no match for *you*. This young lady was lying in wait for money, and you had no money. What are you, I should like to know, that you were to have the audacity to follow up this young lady? This young lady was looking about the market for a good bid; she wasn't in it to be snapped up by fellows that had no money to lay out; nothing to buy with.

Bella, (going quickly to Mrs. Boffin.) Oh, Mr. Boffin! Mrs. Boffin, pray say something for me! *(Mrs. B. weeps.)*

Mr. B. Old lady, you hold your tongue. Bella, my dear, don't you let yourself be put out. I'll right you.

Bella. But you don't, you don't right me! You wrong me!

Mr. B. Don't you be put out, my dear. Now, you Rokesmith! You hear me tell you that the first side of your conduct was Insolence — Insolence and Presumption. Answer me one thing, if you can. Didn't this young lady tell you so herself?

Bella, (burying her face in her hands.) Did I, Mr. Rokesmith? O say, Mr. Rokesmith! Did I?

Roke. Don't be distressed, Miss Wilfer; it matters very little now.

Mr. B. Ah! You can't deny it, though!

Bella. But I have asked him to forgive me since; and I would ask him to forgive me now again, upon my knees, if it would spare him. *(Mrs. B. bursts into tears.)*

Mr. B. Old lady, stop that noise ! Tender-hearted in you, Miss Bella. Now, you Rokesmith, I tell you that's one side of your conduct — Insolence and Presumption. Now, I'm a-coming to the other, which is much worse. This was a speculation of yours.

Roke. I indignantly deny it.

Mr. B. It's of no use your denying it ; I've got a head upon my shoulders, and it ain't a baby's. What ! Don't I know what grabs are made at a man with money ? If I didn't keep my eyes open, and my pockets buttoned, shouldn't I be brought to the workhouse before I knew where I was ? I'm agoing to unfold your plan before this young lady ; I'm agoing to show this young lady the second view of you ; and nothing you can say will stave it off. (*Bella sinks into a chair and hides her face.*) Now, attend here, Bella my dear. Rokesmith, you're a needy chap. You're a chap that I pick up in the street. Are you, or ain't you ?

Roke. Go on, Mr. Boffin ; don't appeal to me.

Mr. B. Not appeal to *you* ! No, I should hope not ! Appealing to *you*, would be rather a rum course. You come and ask me in the street to take you for a Secretary, and I take you. Very good.

Roke. Very bad.

Mr. B. What do you say ? This Rokesmith is a needy young man that I take for my Secretary out of the open street. This Rokesmith gets acquainted with my affairs, and gets to know that I mean to settle a sum of money on this young lady. "Oho !" says this Rokesmith ; "this will be a good haul ; I'll go in for this !" But fortunately she was too many for him, and a pretty figure he cuts now he is exposed. There he stands ! Look at him !

Roke. Your unfortunate suspicions, Mr. Boffin —

Mr. B. Precious unfortunate for *you*, I can tell you.

Roke. — are not to be combated by any one, and I address myself to no such hopeless task. But I will say a word upon the truth.

Mr. B. (*snapping his fingers.*) Yah ! Much you care about the truth.

Mrs. B. Noddy ! My dear love !

Mr. B. Old lady, you keep still. I tell him again, much he cares about the truth.

Roke. Our connection being at an end, Mr. Boffin, it can be of very little moment to me what you say.

Mr. B. Oh ! You are knowing enough to have found out that our connection's at an end, eh ? But you can't get beforehand with me. Look at this in my hand. This is your pay, on your discharge. You can only follow suit. You can't deprive me of the lead. Let's have no pretending that you discharge yourself. I discharge you.

Roke. So that I go, it is all one to me.

Mr. B. Is it ? But it's two to me, let me tell you. Old lady, don't you cut in. You keep still.

Roke. Have you said all you wish to say to me ?

Mr. B. I don't know whether I have or not. It depends.

Roke. Perhaps you will consider whether there are any other strong expressions that you would like to bestow upon me?

Mr. B. I'll consider that at my convenience, and not at yours.

Mrs. B. Noddy! My dear, dear Noddy! You sound so hard!

Mr. B. Old lady, if you cut in when requested not, I'll get a pillow and carry you out of the room upon it. What do you want to say, you Rokesmith?

Roke. To you, Mr. Boffin, nothing. But to Miss Wilfer and to your good kind wife, a word.

Mr. B. Out with it then, and out it short, for we've had enough of you.

Roke. I have borne with my false position here, that I might not be separated from Miss Wilfer. Since Miss Wilfer rejected me I have never again urged my suit, to the best of my belief, with a spoken syllable or a look. But I have never changed in my devotion to her, except—if she will forgive my saying so—that it is deeper than it was, and better founded.

Mr. B. Now, mark this chap's saying, Miss Wilfer, when he means Pounds, Shillings, and Pence!

Roke. My interest in Miss Wilfer began when I first saw her, even began when I had only heard of her. It was, in fact, the cause of my throwing myself in Mr. Boffin's way, and entering his service. Miss Wilfer has never known this until now.

Mr. B. Now, this is a very artful dog. This is a longer-headed schemer than I thought him. See how patiently and methodically he goes to work. He says to himself, "I'll get in with Boffin, and I'll get in with this young lady, and I'll work 'em both at the same time, and I'll bring my pigs to market somewhere." I hear him say it, bless you! Why, I look at him now, and I see him say it! But luckily he hadn't to deal with the people he supposed, Bella my dear! And he's beat, that's what he is; regularly beat. He thought to squeeze money out of us, and he has done for himself instead, Bella my dear! There's your pay, Rokesmith, (*throwing money on the floor.*) I dare say you can stoop to pick it up, after what you have stooped to here.

Roke. I have stooped to nothing but this; and this is mine, for I have earned it by the hardest of hard labor.

Mr. B. You're a pretty quick packer, I hope; because the sooner you are gone, bag and baggage, the better for all parties.

Roke. You need have no fear of my lingering.

Mr. B. You *pretend* to have a mighty admiration for this young lady?

Roke. I do not pretend.

Mr. B. Oh! Well. You *have* a mighty admiration for this young lady—since you are so particular?

Roke. Yes.

Mr. B. How do you reconcile that, with this young lady's fling-

ing up her money to the church-weathercocks, and racing off at a splitting pace for the workhouse?

Roke. I don't understand you.

Mr. B. Don't you? Or wcn't you? What else could you have made this young lady out to be, if she had listened to such addresses as yours?

Roke. What else, if I had been so happy as to win her affections and possess her heart!

Mr. B. Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew says the cat, Quack-quack says the duck, Bow-wow-wow says the dog! Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew, Quack-quack, Bow-wow! What is due to this young lady is Money, and this young lady right well knows it.

Roke. You slander the young lady.

Mr. B. You slander the young lady; you with your affections and hearts and trumpery. You and your affections and hearts are a Lie, sir!

Roke. Mrs. Boffin, for your delicate and unvarying kindness I thank you with the warmest gratitude. Good-bye! Miss Wilfer, good-bye!

Mr. B. And now, my dear, I hope you feel that you've been righted!

Bella, (starting up.) O Mr. Rokesmith, before you go, if you could but make me poor again! Oh! Make me poor again, somebody, I beg and pray, or my heart will break if this goes on! Pa dear, make me poor again and take me home! I was bad enough there, but I have been so much worse here. Don't give me money, Mr. Boffin, I won't have money. Keep it away from me, and only let me speak to good little pa, and lay my head upon his shoulder, and tell him all my griefs. Nobody else can understand me, nobody else can comfort me, nobody else knows how unworthy I am, and yet can love me like a little child. I am better with pa than any one — more innocent, more sorry, more glad! (*Throws herself at Mrs. Boffin's feet, weeping.*)

Mr. B. There, my dear, there. You are righted; and it's all right.

Bella. I hate you! At least, I can't hate you, but I don't like you.

Mr. B. Hullo!

Bella, (rising.) You are a scolding, unjust, abusive, aggravating, bad old creature. I am angry with my ungrateful self for calling you such names, but you are! You are! You know you are! I have heard you with shame! — shame for myself, and shame for you. You ought to be above the base tale-bearing of a time-serving creature, but you are above nothing now. When I came here I honored you and respected you, and I soon loved you. But now I can't bear the sight of you. At least, I don't know as I ought to go so far as that — only — you're a monster! The best wish I can

wish you as that you hadn't a single farthing in the world. If any true friend could make you a bankrupt you would be a duck, but as a man of property you're a—demon. Mr. Rokesmith, pray stay one moment. Pray hear one word from me before you go. I am deeply sorry for the reproaches you have borne on my account. Out of the depths of my heart I earnestly and truly beg your pardon.
(*Gives her hand.*)

Roke. God bless you!

Bella. Mr. Boffin's speeches were detestable to me, shocking to me. It is quite true that there was a time when I deserved to be so righted, but I hope that I shall never deserve it again.

(*ROKE. raises her hand to his lips, and exit L.*)

Bella. He has gone. He has been most shamefully treated, and most unjustly and basely driven away, and I am the cause of it. I must go home. I am very grateful to you for all you have done for me, but I cannot stay here.

Mrs. B. My darling girl!

Bella. No, I cannot stay here. Oh, you vicious old thing!

Mrs. B. Don't be rash, my love. Think well of what you do.

Mr. B. Yes, you had better think well of what you do.

Bella. I shall never more think well of you. And, what is more, you're wholly undeserving of the Gentleman you have lost.

Mr. B. Why, you don't mean to say, Miss Bella, that you set up Rokesmith against me?

Bella. I do! He is worth a Million of you. I would rather he thought well of me, though he swept the street for bread, than that you did, though you splashed the mud upon him from the wheels of a chariot of pure gold—There!

Mr. B. Well, I'm sure!

Bella. And for a long time past, when you have thought you set yourself above him, I have only seen you under his feet—There! And throughout I saw in him the master, and I saw in you the man—There! And when you used him shamefully, I took his part and loved him—There! I boast of it. (*Throws herself into a chair, and cries.*)

Mr. B. Now look here. Give me your attention, Bella. I am not angry.

Bella. I am!

Mr. B. I say I am not angry, and I mean kindly to you, and I want to overlook this. So you'll stay where you are, and we'll agree to say no more about it.

Bella (rising hurriedly.) No, I can't stay here; I can't think of staying here. I must go home for good.

Mr. B. Now don't be silly; don't do what you're sure to be sorry for.

Bella. I shall *never* be sorry for it; and I *should* always be sorry, and should every minute of my life despise myself, if I remained here after what has happened.

Mr. B. At least, Bella, let there be no mistake about it. Look before you leap, you know. Stay where you are, and all's well, and all's as it was to be. Go away, and you can never come back.

Bella. I know that I can never come back, and that's what I mean.

Mr. B. You mustn't expect that I'm agoing to settle money on you if you leave us like this, because I am not. No, Bella! Be careful! Not one brass farthing.

Bella. Expect! Do you think that any power on earth could make me take it, if you did, sir? (*Goes to MRS. B. and falls on her knees before her.*) You're a dear, a dear, the best of dears! I can never be thankful enough to you, and can never forget you. If I should live to be blind and deaf, I know I shall see and hear you, in my fancy, to the last of my dim old days!

Mrs. B. My dear girl! My darling girl! My sweet pretty!

Bella (*rising and going to MR. B.*) I am very glad that I called you names, sir, because you richly deserved it. But I am very sorry that I called you names, because you used to be so different. Say good-bye!

Mr. B. Good-bye.

Bella. If I knew which of your hands was the least spoiled, I would ask you to let me touch it, for the last time.

Mr. B. Try the left hand; it's the least used.

Bella (*taking his hand.*) You have been wonderfully good and kind to me, and I kiss it for that. You have been as bad as bad could be to Mr. Rokesmith, and I throw it away for that. Thank you for myself, and good-bye!

Mr. B. Good-bye. (*BELLA kisses him suddenly, embraces MRS. B., and runs out L.*)

Mr. B. (*slapping his knees and laughing.*) Ha, ha! What do you think of me now, old lady? Wasn't I a regular old brown one?

Mrs. B. (*wiping her eyes.*) O Noddy, you was so hard.

Mr. B. Of course I was, old lady; but didn't I bring her round? Ha, ha! (*Imitating BELLA.*) "You're a monster! and I never again shall think well of you!" Didn't she put it to me, old lady? (*Imitating as before.*) "I hate you!" Ha, ha! Didn't she look pretty, and didn't her little eyes snap and her little feet beat the floor? I tell you, old lady, we've done a glorious day's work.

Mrs. B. But we've lost her for ever, Noddy.

Mr. B. Not a bit of it. *She* thinks so, no doubt. But I tell you it'll be all right before we know it. Wasn't I a grisly old growler, though? I knew she'd come through it true golden gold, and she has. Now she'll run home and John will go after her, and they'll both be happy, and we'll be happy too, old lady, and bide our time. This is the happiest piece of work we've ever done, old lady, I'll be bound. (*Seizes MRS. B. round the waist and dances with her about the room and out through the entrance C.*)

SCENE II. — *A dingy office. Desks, stools, &c. Doors R. and L. Window C. R. W. seated at desk, R. C., eating bread and milk.*

R. W. I wonder if my little Bella is really enjoying herself with all her riches and elegance. (*Sighs.*) When she comes to see her poor, shabby old father, she looks so lovely and is dressed so beautifully that I feel almost afraid she'll forget us all one of these days, after she marries the enormously wealthy husband that she talks so much about. Well, well, poor old Rumty will be sorry to lose his lovely woman, for she's a very sweet and dear little woman in spite of her mercenary ideas. God bless her! (*BELLA runs in L., seizes*

R. W. round the neck and kisses him heartily.)

Bella There, dear pa, how do you like that?

R. W. (breathlessly.) Very much, my dear. But, my dear, I never was so surprised! The idea of your coming down the lane yourself. Why didn't you send the footman down the lane, my love?

Bella (sitting by his side.) I have brought no footman with me, pa.

R. W. Oh, indeed! But you have brought the elegant turnout, my love?

Bella. No, pa.

R. W. You never can have walked, my dear?

Bella. Yes, I have, pa.

R. W. The idea of a splendid —

Bella. What's the matter, pa?

R. W. — of a splendid female putting up with such accommodation as the present. Is that a new dress you have on, dear?

Bella. No, pa, an old one. Don't you remember it?

R. W. Why, I *thought* I remembered it, my dear!

Bella. You should, for you bought it, pa?

R. W. Yes, I *thought* I bought it, my dear!

Bella. And have you grown so fickle that you don't like your own taste, pa dear?

R. W. Well, my love, I should have thought it was hardly sufficiently splendid for existing circumstances.

Bella. And so, pa, you sometimes have a quiet tea here all alone? I am not in the tea's way, if I draw my arm over your shoulder like this, pa?

R. W. Yes, my dear; and no, my dear. Yes to the first question, and Certainly Not to the second. Respecting the quiet tea, my dear, why you see the occupations of the day are sometimes a little wearing; and if there's nothing interposed between the day and your mother, why *she* is sometimes a little wearing too.

Bella. I know, pa.

R. W. Yes, my dear. So sometimes I put a quiet tea at the win-

dow here, with a little quiet contemplation of the Lane (which comes soothing), between the day, and domestic —

Bella. Bliss.

R. W. And domestic Bliss.

Bella. And it is in this dark dingy place of captivity, poor dear, that you pass all the hours of your life when you are not at home?

R. W. Not at home, or not on the road there, or on the road here, my love. Yes. You see that little desk in the corner?

Bella. In the dark corner, farthest both from the light and from the fireplace? The shabbiest desk of all the desks!

R. W. Now, does it really strike you in that point of view, my dear? That's mine. That's called Rumty's Perch.

Bella (indignantly.) Whose Perch?

R. W. Rumty's. You see, being rather high and up two steps, they call it a Perch. And they call me Rumty.

Bella. How dare they!

R. W. They're playful, Bella my dear; they're playful. They're more or less younger than I am, and they're playful. What does it matter? I might be Surly, or Sulky, or fifty disagreeable things that I really shouldn't like to be considered. But Rumty! Lor, why not Rumty? (*Resumes eating.*)

Bella (after a pause.) Pa dear, don't be cast down, but I must tell you something disagreeable.

R. W. (not heeding BELLA.) My gracious me! This is very extraordinary.

Bella. What is, pa?

R. W. (looking out of window.) Why here's Mr. Rokesmith now!

Bella. No, no, pa, no; surely not.

R. W. Yes, there he is! Look here!

Enter ROKESMITH, L. He comes forward quickly, and as BELLA rises, catches her in his arms.

Roke. My dear, dear girl; my gallant, generous, disinterested, courageous, noble girl! (*BELLA lays her head on his shoulder.*) I knew you would come to him, and I followed you. My love, my life! You ARE mine?

Bella. Yes, I AM yours, if you think me worth taking. (*A pause.*) But we must think of dear pa. I haven't told dear pa: let us speak to pa.

R. W. (faintly.) I wish first, my dear, that you'd have the kindness to sprinkle me with a little milk, for I feel as if I was — Going.

Bella (kisses R. W. and makes him drink some milk.) We'll break it to you gently, dearest pa.

R. W. My dear, you broke so much in the first — Gush, if I may so express myself — that I think I am equal to a good large breakage now.

Roke. Mr. Wilfer, Bella takes me, though I have no fortune, even no present occupation; nothing but what I can get in the life before us. Bella takes me! (*Embraces her.*)

R. W. Yes, I should rather have inferred, my dear sir, that Bella took you, from what I have within these few minutes remarked.

Bella. You don't know, pa, how ill I have used him!

Roke. You don't know, sir, what a heart she has!

Bella. You don't know, pa, what a shocking creature I was growing, when he saved me from myself!

Roke. You don't know, sir, what a sacrifice she has made for me!

R. W. My dear Bella, and my dear John Rokesmith, if you will allow me so to call you —

Bella. Yes do, pa, do! I allow you, and my will is his law. Isn't it — dear John Rokesmith? (*ROKE. embraces BELLA again.*)

R. W. I think, my dears, that if you could make it convenient to sit one on one side of me, and the other on the other, we should get on rather more consecutively, and make things rather plainer. (*They sit one on each side of R. W.*) John Rokesmith mentioned, a while ago, that he had no present occupation.

Roke. None.

Bella. No, pa, none.

R. W. From which I argue that he has left Mr. Boffin.

Bella. Yes, pa. And so —

R. W. Stop a bit, my dear. I wish to lead up to it by degrees. And that Mr. Boffin has not treated him well?

Bella. Has treated him most shamefully, dear pa!

R. W. Of which a certain mercenary young person distantly related to myself could not approve? Am I leading up to it right?

Bella. Could not approve, sweet pa.

R. W. Upon which the certain mercenary young person distantly related to myself, having previously observed and mentioned to myself that prosperity was spoiling Mr. Boffin, felt that she must not sell her sense of what was right and what was wrong, and what was true and what was false, and what was just and what was unjust, for any price that could be paid to her by any one alive? Am I leading up to it right?

Bella. Yes, pa.

R. W. And therefore — and therefore this mercenary young person distantly related to myself refused the price, took off the splendid fashions that were part of it, put on the comparatively poor dress that I had last given her, and trusting to my supporting her in what was right, came straight to me. Have I led up to it?

Bella (*stealing her arm round his neck.*) Yes, pa dear.

R. W. The mercenary young person distantly related to myself did well! The mercenary young person distantly related to myself did not trust me in vain! I admire this mercenary young person distantly related to myself more in this dress than if she had come to me in China silks, Cashmere shawls, and Golconda diamonds. I

love this young person dearly. I say to the man of this young person's heart, out of my heart and with all of it, "My blessing on this engagement betwixt you, and she brings you a good fortune when she brings you the poverty she has accepted for your sake and the honest truth's!" (*Kisses BELLA, and shakes ROKE. by the hand.*)

Bella. Thank you, pa dear, for being so good to your little wilful Bella.

Roke. I thank you, sir, for my Bella and myself.

R. W. (lightly.) Well, well, now let's be merry. Here is another loaf and plenty more milk, and if it isn't a very sumptuous repast, we can be just as happy as the three bears in their house in the forest. (*Laughing.*) I'll be the great big large bear.

Roke (gaily.) And I the middle-sized bear.

Bella (taking a hand of each.) And I the little, small, wee bear. Only, pa dear, and John, you must not eat up the poor little wee bear, because she's a very weak and silly little bear, and you are such great, wise, strong bears.

Roke. My darling!

R. W. My own little Bella!

Bella. And now, pa dear, and John, I'll set the stylish table with the elegant repast, and we'll all be happy and comfortable. (*They prepare to eat.*)

Act Drop.

ACT IV.

SCENE. — *Same as Act I.*

MRS. WILFER, *sitting* L. LAVVY *setting table* R. C. GEORGE S., *with cane in mouth, extreme R., gazing at LAVVY.* R. W. *changing coat and boots for dressing-gown and slippers, L. C., as curtain rises.*

Mrs. W. You do not, R. W., inquire for your daughter Bella.

R. W. To be sure, my dear, I did omit it. How—or perhaps I should rather say where—is Bella?

Mrs. W. (*folding her arms.*) Not here.

R. W. Oh, indeed, my dear!

Mrs. W. Not here. In a word, R. W., you have no daughter Bella.

R. W. No daughter Bella, my dear?

Mrs. W. No. Your daughter Bella has bestowed herself upon a Mendicant.

R. W. Good gracious, my dear!

Mrs. W. Show your father his daughter Bella's letter, Lavinia. I think your father will admit it to be documentary proof of what I tell him. I believe your father is acquainted with his daughter Bella's writing. But I do not know. He may tell you he is not. Nothing will surprise me.

Lavvy, (*handing letter to R. W.*) Posted at Greenwich and dated this morning. Hopes Ma won't be angry, but is happily married to Mr. John Rokesmith, and didn't mention it beforehand to avoid words, and please tell darling you, and love to me, and I should like to know what you'd have said if any other unmarried member of the family had done it! (*Sits close by GEORGE'S side with a condescending air.*)

R. W. (*reading the letter.*) Dear me!

Mrs. W. You may well say "Dear me!"

R. W. Dear me!

Mrs. W. You said that before.

R. W. (*sitting.*) It's very surprising. But I suppose, my dear, that we must make the best of it? Would you object to my pointing out, my dear, that Mr. John Rokesmith is not (so far as I am acquainted with him), strictly speaking, a Mendicant.

Mrs. W. Indeed? Truly so? I was not aware that Mr. John Rokesmith was a gentleman of landed property. But I am much relieved to hear it.

R. W. (*meekly.*) I doubt if you *have* heard it, my dear.

Mrs. W. Thank you. I make false statements, it appears. So be it. If my daughter flies in my face, surely my husband may.

The one thing is not more unnatural than the other. There seems a fitness in the arrangement. By all means!

Lavvy. Ma, I must say I think it would be much better if you would keep to the point, and not hold forth about people's flying into people's faces, which is nothing more nor less than impossible nonsense.

Mrs. W. How!

Lavvy. Just im-possible nonsense, ma; and George Sampson knows it is, as well as I do. The true point is, that Bella has behaved in a most unsisterly way to me, and might have severely compromised me with George and with George's family, by making off and getting married in this very low and disreputable manner — with some pew-opener or other, I suppose, for a bridesmaid — when she ought to have confided in me, and ought to have said, "If, Lavvy, you consider it due to your engagement with George, that you should countenance the occasion by being present, then, Lavvy, I beg you to be present, keeping my secret from ma and pa." As of course I should have done.

Mrs. W. As of course you would have done? Ingrate! Viper!

George S. (rising and feebly advancing.) I say! You know, ma'am. Upon my honor you mustn't. With the highest respect for you, ma'am, upon my life you mustn't. No really, you know. When a man with the feelings of a gentleman finds himself engaged to a young lady, and it comes (even on the part of a member of the family) to vipers, you know! — I would merely put it to your own good feeling, you know. (*Mrs. W. rises and glares at GEORGE S.*)

Lavvy, (rising and stepping tragically between them.) My own unnatural mother wants to annihilate George! But you shan't be annihilated, George. I'll die first! (*Flings her arms round his neck and clings to him with a melodramatic air.*)

George S. (shaking his head at Mrs. W.) With every sentiment of respect for you, you know, ma'am — vipers really doesn't do you credit.

Lavvy, (wildly.) You shall not be annihilated, George! Ma shall destroy me first, and then she'll be contented. Oh, oh, oh! Have I lured George from his happy home to expose him to this? George dear, be free! Leave me, ever dearest George, to ma and to my fate. Give my love to your aunt, George, and implore her not to curse the viper that has crossed your path and blighted your existence. Oh, oh, oh! (*Falls into mock hysterics in his arms; he deposits her in chair C., where she remains moaning and sobbing extravagantly.*)

George S. (bending over LAVVY.) Demon — with the highest respect for you, ma'am — behold your work!

Lavvy, (faintly.) George dear, are you safe? George love, what has happened? Where is ma? (*GEORGE assists her to Mrs. W., who kisses her forehead; he then returns her to chair C.*) George dear, I am afraid I have been foolish; but I am still a little

weak and giddy; don't let go my hand, George. George dear, after what has passed, I am sure ma will tell pa that he may tell Bella we shall all be glad to see her and her husband.

George S. I am sure of it. I eminently respect Mrs. Wilfer, and ever must, and ever shall. Never more eminently than after what has passed.

Mrs. W. (in a very deep voice.) Far be it from me to run counter to the feelings of a child of mine, and of a Youth who is the object of her maiden preference. I may feel — nay, know — that I have been deluded and deceived. I may feel — nay, know — that I have been set aside and passed over. I may feel — nay, know — that after having so far overcome my repugnance toward Mr. and Mrs. Boffin as to receive them under this roof, and to consent to your daughter Bella's residing under theirs, it were well if your daughter Bella had profited in a worldly point of view by a connection so distasteful, so disreputable. I may feel — nay, know — that in uniting herself to Mr. Rokesmith she has united herself to one who is, in spite of shallow sophistry, a Mendicant. And I may feel well assured that your daughter Bella does not exalt her family by becoming a Mendicant's bride. But I suppress what I feel, and say nothing of it.

George S. This is the sort of thing, ma'am, that a man must expect, you know, from one who has ever been an example in her family, and never an outrage. Never more so, ma'am, than after what has passed. I shall never forget, ma'am; the touching feelings that your conduct has awakened within me. And Lavinia's also, whom I respect with a feeling little less than — divine. Yes, ma'am, I hope there isn't a man with a beating heart, ma'am, that isn't capable of — yes — of — yes certainly, to be sure.

(Restores cane to his mouth, and sits confused.)

Mrs. W. Therefore, R. W., let your daughter Bella come when she will, and she will be received. So — so will her husband.

Lavvy. And I beg, pa, that you will not tell Bella what I have undergone. It can do no good, and it might cause her to reproach herself.

George S. My dearest girl, she ought to know it.

Lavvy. No, dearest George, let it be buried in oblivion.

George S. Too noble!

Lavvy. Nothing is too noble, dearest George. And I hope, pa, that you will avoid mentioning George's rising prospects when Bella is present. It might seem like taunting her with her own poor fortunes. Let me ever remember that I am her younger sister, and ever spare her painful contrasts, which could not but wound her deeply.

George S. Ah, such is the demeanor of Angels!

Lavvy. No, dearest George, I am but too well aware that I am merely human.

Mrs. W. (suddenly turning to R. W.) Can you think of your daughter Bella, and SLEEP?

R. W. (waking.) Yes — I think I can, my dear.

Mrs. W. Then I would recommend you, if you have a human feeling, to retire to bed.

R. W. Thank you, my dear; but I think we will have a little supper first. (*Goes to table.*)

Lavvy. George! Ma's chair. (*GEORGE follows MRS. W. to table and places chair for her; she glaring at him. They sit at table, MRS. W. facing audience L. LAVVY same, R. GEORGE and R. W. beside them in front. Leave space behind table for BELLA and ROKE. R. W. cuts loaf and helps all.*)

Lavvy. Now, ma and pa, tell me if I wasn't right about those Boffins. George Sampson, speak! What did I tell you about those Boffins?

George S. (murmuring.) Yes, indeed.

Lavvy. Yes! I told George Sampson, as George Sampson tells you, that those hateful Boffins would pick a quarrel with Bella, as soon as her novelty had worn off. (*GEORGE passes his arm round her waist, but withdraws it with a sharp exclamation.*) You must be careful, George. As I was saying, those Boffins have behaved in a detestable manner, and as Bella's sister and an engaged young lady — (*GEORGE essays as before.*) Look out, George, you'll prick yourself again — I feel bound to express my opinion of them.

R. W. Will you have a little of the salad, my dear?

Mrs. W. I thank you, R. W.

Lavvy. I wish to goodness, ma, that you'd loll a little.

Mrs. W. How! Loll!

Lavvy. Yes, ma.

Mrs. W. I hope I am incapable of it.

Lavvy. I am sure you look so, ma. But why one should sit at one's own table as if one's under-petticoat was a backboard, I do not understand.

Mrs. W. Neither do I understand how a young lady can mention the garment in the name of which you have indulged. I blush for you.

Lavvy. Thank you, ma; but I can do it for myself, I am obliged to you, when there's any occasion.

George S. After all, you know, ma'am, we all know it's there.

Mrs. W. We know it's there!

Lavvy. Really, George, I must say that I don't understand your allusions, and that I think you might be more delicate and less personal.

George S. Go it! Oh yes! Go it, Miss Lavinia Wilfer!

Lavvy. What you may mean, George Sampson, by your omnibus-driving expressions, I cannot pretend to imagine. Neither do

I wish to imagine. It is enough for me to know in my own heart that I am not going to — go it.

George S. Oh yes! Thus it ever is. I never —

Lavvy. If you mean to say that you never brought up a young gazelle, you may save yourself the trouble, because nobody supposes that you ever did. We know you better.

Mrs. W. Mr. Sampson, I cannot permit you to misrepresent the intentions of a child of mine.

Lavvy. Let him alone, ma. It is indifferent to me what he says or does.

George S. Dearest Lavinia, I adore you!

Lavvy. Then, if you can't do it in a more agreeable manner, I wish you wouldn't.

George S. I also respect you, ma'am, to an extent which must ever be below your merits, I am well aware, but still up to an uncommon mark. I am painfully conscious of my own unworthiness. Is it not pardonable if I feel sensitive, ma'am, when I see a disposition on the part of my adorable Lavinia to take me up short?

Lavvy. George, notwithstanding all these surroundings, I am yours — as yet. How long that may last is another question, but I am yours *as yet*.

Enter BELLA and ROKESMITH, L.

Bella. Dearest ma, how do you do, dearest ma? And Lavvy darling, how do you do? And George, how do you do? And when are you going to be married, and how rich are you going to grow? You must tell me all about it presently. (*Throws off her hat and sits at table.*) Dearest pa, how do you do? good dear little pa! John dear, kiss Ma and Lavvy, and then we shall all be at home and comfortable. (*ROKE kisses MRS. W. and LAVVY, and then sits beside BELLA.*) Now let me pour out the tea. Dearest Ma and Lavvy, you both take sugar I know. I didn't before I was married, but I do now, because John does. Cut some more bread and butter, John, there's a love! Ma likes hers doubled. And, John dear, did you kiss Ma and Lavvy? Oh you did? Well, I only asked because I didn't see you.

Lavvy. What's the matter, ma, ain't you well?

Mrs. W. (*who has been glaring motionless at BELLA.*) Doubtless I am very well. What should be the matter with me?

Lavvy. You don't seem very brisk, ma.

Mrs. W. Brisk! brisk! Whence the low expression, Lavinia? If I am uncomplaining, if I am silently contented with my lot, let that suffice for my family.

George S. Yes, ma'am, to be sure.

Bella. And now you must tell me, dearest Ma and Lavvy, upon your words and honors! Didn't you for a moment — just a moment — think I was a dreadful little wretch when I wrote to say

I had run away? I think it must have made you rather cross. But you see I had been such a heedless, heartless creature, and had led you so to expect that I should marry for money, that I was sly about it, and so I said to John that if he liked to take me without any fuss, he might. And as he did like, I let him.

Mrs. W. On a day like this, the mind naturally reverts to papa and mamma. (I here allude to my parents.) I was considered tall; perhaps I was. Papa and mamma were unquestionably tall. I have rarely seen a finer woman than my mother; never than my father.

Lavvy. Whatever grandpapa was, he wasn't a female.

Mrs. W. Your grandpapa was what I describe him to have been, and would have struck any of his grandchildren to the earth who presumed to question it. It was one of mamma's cherished hopes that I should become united to a tall member of society. Mamma would appear to have had an indefinable foreboding of what afterwards happened, for she would frequently urge upon me, "Not a little man. Promise me, my child, not a little man. Never, never, never marry a little man." Among the most prominent members of that distinguished circle, was a gentleman measuring six feet four in height. He was not an engraver.

George S. No, ma'am, of course not.

Mrs. W. This gentleman was so obliging as to honor me with attentions which I could not fail to understand.

George S. When it comes to that you know, you can always tell, ma'am.

Mrs. W. I immediately announced to both my parents that those attentions were misplaced, and that I could not favor his suit. They inquired was he too tall? I replied it was not the stature, but the intellect was too lofty. I well remember mamma's clasping her hands, and exclaiming "This will end in a little man!" Within a month I first saw R. W., my husband. Within a year I married him. It is natural for the mind to recall these dark coincidences on the present day.

R. W. My dear, I am really afraid you are not enjoying yourself.

Mrs. W. On the contrary, R. W., quite so.

Bella. And now you will naturally want to know, dearest ma and Lavvy, how we live and what we have got to live upon. Well! And so we live on Blackheath, in the charm-ingest of dolls' houses, de-lightfully furnished; and we have a hundred and fifty pounds a year, and we have all we want, and more. And lastly, if you would like to know in confidence, as perhaps you may, what is my opinion of my husband, my opinion is — that I almost love him!

Roke. And if you would like to know in confidence, as perhaps you may, my opinion of my wife, my opinion is —

Bella. Stop, sir! No, John dear! Seriously! Please not yet a while! I want to be something so much worthier than the doll in the dolls' house.

Roke. My darling, are you not?

Bella. Not half, not a quarter, so much worthier as I hope you will some day find me ! Try me through some reverses, John, and then tell me what you think of me.

Roke. I will, my Life. I promise it.

Bella. That's my dear John ! And you won't speak a word now ; will you ?

Roke. And I won't speak a word now !

Bella. I'll go further, Pa, and Ma, and Lavvy. John don't suspect it — he has no idea of it — but I quite love him !

Roke. And now may I speak a word, my dear ?

Bella. Yes, John dear, now I'll allow you.

Roke. (rising.) My love, now that we are all here together, and so happy and contented, I have a little surprise for you.

Bella. Another surprise, John ?

Roke. Yes. (*Goes to door L. and admits MR. and MRS. BOFFIN.*) And I hope a pleasant one.

Bella (rising and meeting Mrs. B.) Dear, kind Mrs. Boffin.

Mrs. B. My dearest dear darling, sweet pretty pretty. (*Embraces BELLA.*) And here is Noddy too, my child ; don't you see him ?

Bella. Yes, but — I thought —

Mr. B. (shaking her by the hand.) Never mind what you thought, Bella my dear. Ha ! ha ! John understands all about it ; so does the old lady.

Bella. John understands ? But what does it all mean ?

R. W. (bringing chairs forward, c.) Hadn't you better offer your visitors some chairs, my dear ?

Bella. Yes, pa ; but — I am so bewildered, I quite forgot.

Mrs. B. Come, deary, sit right here by me ; and John you sit the other side ; and then we shall be comfortable.

(*MRS. B. and BELLA sit in chairs C. ROKE. sits at BELLA's left. MR. B. sits R. C.*)

Mrs. W. (advancing down C.) Pardon me ! But when persons comparatively unknown to this household enter here, after what has transpired in regard to my daughter Bella, it were surely fitting in one who claims to be a parent, though a humble one, to seek to know their design.

Mr. B. (rising and shaking Mrs. W.'s hand.) I hope you'll excuse us, ma'am, and I'm sure you will after you've heard the story. Lord bless us, the old lady'll fix it up in a minute.

Mrs. W. Pardon me ! but it were —

Lavvy. Oh lor, ma, don't make such a fuss about nothing.

Mrs. W. How !

Lavvy. I say don't make such a fuss about just nothing at all, and pray don't stand staring at me in that intensely aggravating manner ! If you see a black on my nose, tell me so ; if you don't, leave me alone.

Mrs. W. Do you address Me in those words ? Do you presume ?

Lavvy. Don't talk about presuming, ma, for goodness sake! A girl who is old enough to be engaged, is quite old enough to object to be stared at as if she was a Clock.

Mrs. W. Audacious one! Your grandmamma, if so addressed by one of her daughters, at any age, would have insisted on her retiring to a dark apartment.

Lavvy. My grandmamma wouldn't have stood staring people out of countenance, I think.

Mrs. W. She would!

Lavvy. Then it's a pity she didn't know better. A pretty exhibition my grandmamma must have made of herself! I wonder whether she ever insisted on people's retiring into the ball of St. Paul's; and if she did, how she got them there!

Mrs. W. Silence! I command silence!

Lavvy. I have not the slightest intention of being silent, ma, but quite the contrary. I am not going to be eyed as if I was a natural curiosity, and sit silent under it. I am not going to have George Sampson eyed, and sit silent under it.

George S. No, certainly not, ma'am, you know.

Mrs. W. If Mr. George Sampson, as a friend of this family, chooses to join with other members in setting aside and passing over your wife, R. W., she has nothing to say. It is quite fitting and appropriate, R. W.

R. W. (bringing chair forward to R. C.) My dear, will you have a chair?

Mrs. W. Thank you, R. W., no! My place is not here.

(MRS. W. turns, walks to extreme R. and sits stiffly. LAVVY and GEORGE S. push back table and clear it during the following.)

R. W. (sitting R. C.) Just as you like, my dear.

(A pause, during which MRS. B. rocks herself back and forward, laughing, clapping her hands, and embracing BELLA by turns.)

Mr. B. (sitting R. C.) Old lady, old lady, if you don't begin, somebody else must.

Mrs. B. I'm agoing to begin, Noddy, my dear; only it isn't easy for a person to know where to begin, when a person is in this state of delight and happiness. Bella, my dear — tell me, who's this? *(pointing to ROKESMITH.)*

Bella. Who's this? My husband.

Mrs. B. Ah! But tell me his name, deary!

Bella. Rokesmith.

Mrs. B. No, it ain't! Not a bit of it.

Bella (bewildered.) At least his name is John, I suppose?

Mrs. B. Ah! I should think so, deary! I should hope so! Many and many is the time I have called him by his name of John. But what's his other name, his true other name? Give a guess, my pretty!

Bella (faintly.) I can't guess.

Mrs. B. I could, and what's more, I did! I found him out, all in a flash as I may say, one night. Didn't I, Noddy?

Mr. B. Ay! That the old lady did!

Mrs. B. Harkee to me, deary. It was after a particular night when John had been disappointed — as he thought — in his affections. It was after a night when John had made an offer to a certain young lady, and the certain young lady had refused it. It was the very next night. My Noddy wanted a paper out of his Secretary's room, and I says to Noddy, "I am going by the door, and I'll ask him for it." I tapped at his door, and he didn't hear me. I looked in, and saw him a-sitting lonely by his fire, brooding over it. He chanced to look up with a pleased kind of smile in my company when he saw me, and then in a single moment, Bella my precious, I knew him! Yes; too many a time had I seen him, when he was a little child, in need of being brightened up with a comforting word! Too many and too many a time to be mistaken, when that glimpse of him come at last! No, no! I knew it was John! So what might you think by this time that your husband's name was, dear?

Bella. Not Harmon? That's not possible!

Mrs. B. Don't tremble. Why not possible, deary, when so many things are possible?

Bella. He was killed.

Mrs. B. Thought to be. But if ever John Harmon drew the breath of life on earth, that is certainly John Harmon's arm round your waist now, my pretty. If ever John Harmon had a wife on earth, that wife is certainly you.

Bella. John, O John! I — cannot understand it all.

Roke. My darling, what Mrs. Boffin says is true. I was supposed to be killed, and was even suspected of my own murder; but I am John Harmon, the very John Harmon who was left to you in old Mr. Harmon's will.

Bella. Oh, I see it all now! Dear, good, unselfish John! You gave up everything, name, fortune, and position, for my sake — that I might not be forced into marrying you, you dear, splendid old John!

Roke. Yes, you have guessed the secret, dear.

Mrs. W. It seems, R. W., that your daughter Bella's husband is not what he has hitherto represented himself to be. You will perhaps remember my dark forebodings at the hour when he entered our abode.

R. W. But, my dear, think how much better it is for Bella and all of us.

Lavvy. Yes, ma, think of being deprived of the privilege of being a Mendicant's mamma!

Mrs. W. Peace, Lavinia! It is as you think, R. W., not as I do.

Mrs. B. But that isn't all yet, my beauty. Bless you, it wasn't John only that was in the secret. We was all of us in it.

Bella. But — I don't understand —

Mrs. B. Of course you don't, my deary. How can you till you're told! So now I am going to tell you. Once, twice, three times, and the horses is off. Here they go! When Noddy and me found out that this was our little John, and that we was living on his rightful property, you should have seen how frightened my Noddy was; and says he, "Old lady, we must give it all back to John and make him happy." But you see John wouldn't do that on account of a certain lovely woman. This naturally brings up a confabulation regarding the certain fair young person; when Noddy gives it as his opinion that she is a deary creetur. "She may be a leetle spoilt, and nat'rally spoilt," he says, "by circumstances, but that's only on the surface; and I lay my life," he says, "that she's the true golden gold at heart."

Mr. B. That's it, that's it! And you said so too, old lady.

Mrs. B. Don't you mind him, my dear; stick to me. Then says John, O, if he could but prove so! Then we both of us ups and says that minute, "Prove so!" "What will content you?" says we. "If she was to stand up for you when you was slighted, if she was to show herself of a generous mind when you was oppressed, if she was to be truest to you when you was poorest and friendliest, and all this against her own seeming interest, how would that do?" "Do!" says John; "it would raise me to the skies."

Mr. B. "Then," says I, "make your preparations for the ascent, John, it being my firm belief that up you go."

Mrs. B. And then he began, Bella my precious; and Lord bless us, how he *did* begin!

Mr. B. I was a regular grisly old growler, wasn't I, Bella my dear? Ha, ha! "Mew," says the cat, "Bow wow," says the dog, "Quack quack," says the duck. Ha! ha! ha! (*Walks about, laughing.*)

Bella (rising.) Oh, now I see it all. You dear, dear Mr. Boffin! You didn't mean it, after all. (*Goes to him and shakes his hand in both of hers.*) And, Mrs. Boffin, how kind and good you were to me when I was such a little wretch. (*Embraces her; she rises.*) And John too, all of you doing everything to bring good-for-nothing little me to my senses. (*Going to R. W., who rises.*) Pa dear, why is it that you all have been so kind and considerate with me? Dear, good little Pa! And Ma dear, now you see how good and kind my Mr. and Mrs. Boffin have been to me.

Mrs. W. (rising.) The claims of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin upon my child are doubtless of paramount importance. It is quite fitting, R. W., that such should be the case.

Bella. But is the story done? Is there no more of it?

Mrs. B. What more of it should there be, deary?

Bella. Are you sure you have left nothing out of it?

Mrs. B. I don't think I have.

Bella. Then, sir, please, I've something to say to you. (*To MR.*

B., *who stands c.*) Please I beg your pardon, and I made a small mistake of a word when I took leave of you last. Please I have found out something not yet mentioned. Please I don't believe you are a hard-hearted miser at all, and please I don't believe you ever for one single minute were!

Mrs. B. That's it, my deary; he pretended it all, and O my, how he did it!

Mr. B. I assure you, my dear, that on that celebrated day I made what has since been agreed upon to be my grandest demonstration — I allude to Mew says the cat, Quack quack says the duck, and Bow-wow-wow says the dog. Never thought of it afore the moment, my dear! When John said, if he had been so happy as to win your affections and possess your heart, it come into my head to turn round upon him with "Win her affections and possess her heart! Mew says the cat, Quack quack says the duck, and Bow-wow-wow says the dog." I couldn't tell you how it come into my head or where from, but it had so much the sound of a rasper that I own to you it astonished myself. I was awful nigh bursting out a-laughing though, when it made John stare! Ha, ha, ha!

Mrs. B. Well now, my dear, here we all are, and your mother and father's agreed, and Noddy and me's so happy in telling you, and the horses is in, and the story is done, and God bless you, my Beauty, and God bless us all.

MRS. BOFFIN. BELLA.

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SYNOPSIS.

ACT. I. Scene 1. — *Ross Castle, Killarney, by twilight.* "For we'll strike another blow." The wanderers meet. Gerald's oath. Plans for the future. "Innisfail!" Felix feels grateful to an absent brother. "A real raw sprig of the Royal Irish Constabulary." A lucky find and a fruitless search. TREACHERY.

Scene 2. — *A drawing-room in Castle Headford.* A man of gloomy thoughts. "The mound of green." Her father's choice. Effie's misery. "A parting word." The loose shoe. Brandon's sentiments. "Not a hitch in the proceedings." The stolen photograph. A cresfallen foe. "The right! What right!" BAFFLED.

ACT II. Scene 1. — *Exterior of Malone's Cottage.* The old pedagogue in his element. Bog Latin. A stroke of diplomacy. "Who else would I be?"

Scene 2. — *Interior of a mountain hut.* A sad picture. "Greenlea." A strange meeting. An unexpected arrival. "I never heard tell of him, ma'am." A timely visit. "LOVE'S YOUNG DREAM."

ACT III. Scene. — *The Emerald Scoop* — A cave in the Eagle's Nest Mountain. "Now, Con!" A bargain. Felix waiting for Gerald. "The rock! the rock!" The ghost of Mat Dwyer. A tale of many crimes. The signal. "And is the sleep of death so like its image?" "Con! Con! Curse the cowardly rogue, he's gone." THE WANDERER'S DREAM.

ACT. IV. Scene. — *A room in Arbutus Lodge.* A guilty conscience. Felix plays a strange part, but it strikes home with a vengeance. "In heaven or earth there is no hope, there is no hope for me." The magic word. Startling disclosures. Conflicting emotions. A reconciliation. Felix a thinking. "A Michaelmas daisy." The "Best Man" arrives. The music of Innisfail.

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SYNOPSIS:

PROLOGUE. The storm. Robbery and murder. Bound by an oath: "As God is my witness, I will keep this secret until my dying day." Tableau.

Lapse of five years between Prologue and First Act.

ACT I. SCENE 1. Johnson's house. Surrounded by wealth. Sambo in trouble. Return of Seth Randolph. A murder prevented by a mirror. Drucilla's courage. "Rats." Seth runs the establishment. **SCENE 2.** Interview between Sambo and Lucy. "Hev you got the valerian cremens, or are you clean gone crazy?" **SCENE 3.** The blind miller and his family. Jacob Johnson again. His demand for the hand of Mabel. The refusal. Jacob's threat. Edward and Mabel. Elias the oath-bound. Face to face. "For God's sake, who are you?" "Elias Amsden, the last ye bound by an oath."

ACT II. SCENE 1. Interior of mill. Elias and Edward. The hidden money. Elias and his secret. "O, money! money! you are the bane of my life; but I worship you as a god." **SCENE 2.** Sambo and Lucy again. "Lor a mighty! who crushed de tea set? Who broke down de box? Who de—" A ludicrous scene. **SCENE 3.** Jacob and Drucilla. The wolf and the lamb. Mabel pleads for her parents. Jacob's demand. Seth interferes. Edward and Elias pay Raymond's notes. Jacob's discovery. "Every dollar of that money is a base counterfeit." Deeper in the toils than ever. Seth Randolph's remorse. Elias driven to despair. "O, I be doomed—doomed."

ACT III. SCENE 1. Two rogues well met. Plan to secure Mabel. Seth refuses to act. Face to face with Elias. His curse. Jacob's villainy. A diabolical plot. **SCENE 2.** Turned into the streets. Phillip's trust in the Lord. "He will guide us through the wilderness like as he did the Israelites of old, if we are not afeared to trust him." Discovery by Lucy. A friend in need. "Now you just follow me and I'll take you home in half a jiffy." **SCENE 3.** Mabel and the letter. The hound still upon the track. Mother and daughter. "Then, though I crush my heart in doing it, I will marry Jacob Johnson." **SCENE 4.** Jacob starts to burn the mill. **SCENE 5.** Interior of mill. Edward in hiding. Elias contemplates suicide in order to reveal the oath. Seth and Jacob. The check. The drugged wine. Seth outwitted. "O, I am lost! lost!" Jacob fires the mill. **STOP.** flames and smoke. Seth recovers. Locked in. To the rescue of Elias. Edward beneath the trap. A double rescue. Seth Randolph saved, but dying. "Let—let me speak! Ja—Jacob—O, God!—he—Jacob—he done this—he—"

ACT IV. SCENE 1. Mabel and Lucy. Phillip's anxiety, Off to the rescue. "Lead the way, Betty, and I'll follow you with the strength of a giant." **SCENE 2.** Confession and death of Seth Randolph. "Place me where the birds can sing over me, and where streaks of sunshine can reach my grave." **SCENE 3.** Drucilla and Jacob. The dove in the eagle's claw. Elias to the rescue. Phillip, Mrs. Raymond and Lucy. Elias attempts suicide. Timely arrival of Edward. "Kill the fatted calf, the prodigal has returned." Jacob in the toils. Return of the money. A happy termination.

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SYNOPSIS.

ACT I. Capt. Oliphant's home in the North. An unfinished honeymoon. The call of duty. A wife's anguish. "My hand girt on the sword that will be raised against my father!" The rebel spy. **THE STOLEN DESPATCHES.** "He is Madge's father! Rather a thousand times my own disgrace, than be his executioner." The penalty of silence. **DISGRACED.**

ACT II. **SCENE I.** Irish and negro. Colored dentistry. **SCENE II.** The prison. A little story over a bottle of wine. "I understand. Good bye, old friend, and may Heaven bless you." **THE ESCAPE.** A shot in the dark. "Now, my lady Madge, by fair or foul means you must be mine." **SCENE III.** Dead to the world. A wife's devotion. "I must bear it all for Malcolm's sake." A warning. "There is peril everywhere for friends of rebels." A false knave. "To remain is certain death!" **TO THE RESCUE.**

ACT III. **SCENE I.** The camp. "If I could only hear from Madge!" The flower girl. The price of a passport. "I pay it, but to only one." Husband and wife. "What is this woman to you?" A conundrum whose answer is death. "For the love of Heaven, get me the pass!" **THE DESERTER.** **SCENE II.** The villain's suit renewed. "Why not; your husband no longer lives." The lie in his teeth. Misunderstood. "Can you not trust your wife?" **RECAPTURED.** **SCENE III.** **SENTENCED TO DEATH.** "You will sometime know that Malcolm Oliphant died for another's crime—true to the Union—true to the last." **A REPRIEVE.** The spy's death. "We have plotted together and die together." **REUNITED.**

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ACT II. John Master's home. The temperance question. Two sides of an old maid. "Aunt Libby, you're a jewel." Reading the newspaper. "Black satin's in fashion." The bitter past. A story of a wasted life. The unanswered letter. An angel's visit. **THE LETTER ANSWERED AFTER TWENTY YEARS.** The ring and its motto. "To love is to trust." **THE HARVEST OF HAPPINESS.**

ACT III. At Staunton's again. Locking the stable door. White lies and white lilacs. A confession. "*The letter never reached John Master's hands.*" For love's sake. "*He must be told.*" A daughter's happiness. "She will marry the man she loves, but for you." A sacrifice and a promise. **FACE TO FACE.** "I came to fling his treachery in his face, but it is the face of a dead man." False to the last. "For her sake, not yours, I lied." A noble foe. Young love and old. Explained at last. "I am no man's wife." **THE GARNERING OF THE GRAIN.**

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